

Notes
John Day-Snake Resource Advisory Council Meeting
Wednesday, February 22, 2023
8 a.m. – 5:30 p.m. in-person and via Zoom
Prineville District Office – 3050 NE 3rd Street, Prineville, OR 97754

Attendance:

John Day-Snake RAC: Tom Mottl, Randy Jones, Jerry Brummer, Greg Jackle, Shay White, Susan Koppert, Glenn Burleigh, Brian Sykes, Jim Reiss, Katy Nelson, Mary Fleischmann

Agency Representatives: Designated Federal Official Amanda Roberts, Prineville BLM; Wayne Monger, Vale BLM; Joe Aragon, Vale BLM; Alex Ena, Deschutes NF; Clayton Collins, Umatilla NF; Darren Gooding, Wallowa Whitman NF; Cassidy Kern, Ochoco NF

Agency Staff: PAO/RAC Coordinator Kaitlyn Webb, Prineville BLM; Jimmy Eisner, Prineville BLM; Monica Morin, Prineville BLM; Kyle Hensley, Prineville BLM

Public: Cliff Kizer, public; Anne White, Oregon Natural Desert Association

Minutes: Motion to accept minutes from previous meeting was passed.

Agency Updates:

Vale BLM – See attached agency report for details, highlights included the following. Interpretive center work is ongoing, the district plans to complete construction in June. The center will open the following year. The Hemingway construction line is on track. Construction on crew quarters for firefighters continues. The district is reviewing NEPA analysis for the 2020 flood event. The Castle Rock Timber Salvage project is complete. Fire and fuels staff burned 1,680 acres of hand piles last year and piled 3,200 acres by hand and machine.

Prineville BLM – See attached agency report for details, highlights included the following. Updates to the John Day River boater guide are ongoing. The district plans to release the DNA for a proposal to acquire roughly 4,000 acres of private land along the John Day River next week (McDonald's Ferry). Efforts to complete the Thirtymile Recreation and Travel Management Plan continue. Deschutes River has seen a lot of theft on iron rangers. The district is piloting two different types of payment kiosks that should help remedy this issue. Increased numbers of houseless individuals residing on BLM-administered lands are posing a number of challenges including trash and hazmat. Deschutes county is proposing a new landfill site. Currently, no proposed sites are on BLM-administered lands. The district transferred two pieces of equipment to local fire partners. The district is collaborating with local areas with the community wildfire protection planning on fuels treatment works. Recruiting and filling staff is becoming increasingly difficult.

Deschutes NF – See attached agency report for details, highlights included the following. Chosen as one of 10 focal landscapes for Wildfire Crisis Funding. Centered around Sisters, which is a priority fireshed, the number one fireshed in Oregon. Sending money to partners to work on community engagement needs through collaborative landscape funding. Lava River Cave has seen heavy recreational use recently. The forest is piloting a project for a timed entry system on the cave. This system could be good for managing the number of people in the caves as well as good for the staff trying to manage the site. Facing similar challenges to Prineville BLM regarding houseless populations residing on public land, specifically along China Hat Rd and other nearby areas. A significant amount of staff time and hours are being devoted to this challenge.

Glenn asked for more details about fuels reduction efforts around spotted owl habitat.

Umatilla NF – See attached agency report for details. Agency representative Clayton Collins didn't have any updates to share.

Clayton was asked what the status of the Umatilla River is since the flooding incident, he said he would follow up directly with more information.

Clayton was asked for timelines regarding the review of their Forest Plan. He explained that the forest is still getting staff onboarded, so they don't have set timelines in place at the moment. He offered to keep the RAC up to date on the plan as progress is made.

Clayton was asked if it is reasonable to get a report on the desired conditions assessment. Clayton offered to work with the project manager to see if he can get that report to the RAC.

Ochoco NF – See attached agency report for details, highlights included the following. The forest is focusing heavily on special hiring authority opportunities for recruitment efforts. The forest has been implementing fuels reduction projects across 3,000-5,000 acres. They used Great American Outdoors Act funding to add and replace cattle guards. The FS 42 road paving project should be completed this year. The forest is preparing to release a draft environmental assessment late this spring or early summer for the Mill Creek restoration project. The forest doesn't have a comprehensive way to address the magnitude of the fir tree mortality occurring across the forest, being referred to as "Firmeggedon". They are aware of the problem and actively looking at different options to address it. The National Grassland is also facing challenges with houseless populations residing on public land. The forest has been staffing up so that they can meet the needs of the community fire plan management. Their community outreach subcommittee is working on a comprehensive community engagement plan so that they can develop something that the partners can take and run with.

Kassidy was asked what the timeline is for a decision notice on lemon gulch. She explained a draft decision notice for lemon gulch should be available in about eight weeks.

Wallowa-Whitman NF – See attached agency report for details, highlights included the following. The forest is working on their Forest Plan revision. The regional forest planning group is providing focused planning efforts, this will reduce the amount of time the planning process takes. They will make sure the RAC is involved in the communications for any draft. They are still in the pre-draft phase. They have hired a permanent team lead. One of the biggest changes is switching to the 2012 planning rule. The forest is in negotiations with Idaho Power on the Wallowa Lake dam. Seven timber sales are planned for this fiscal year. They are also having difficulties with hiring and are looking for different solutions, similar to everyone else.

Malheur NF – No agency representative present.

Discussion – Planning Subcommittee Membership: The council discussed the purpose and process of subcommittees and talked about the membership of existing subcommittees. Kaitlyn Webb explained that subcommittee meetings are announced in the Federal Register and open to the public. The meetings are held virtually on Zoom, not facilitated in-person.

The council requested that the Designated Federal Official consider the addition of two new subcommittees, one for waterway recreation and another for renewable energy.

Council members asked if it would be helpful for the RAC to look at a subcommittee on agency staffing or houselessness impacts on public lands. Agency representatives noted that these topics aren't appropriate for a subcommittee at this time.

Presentation – Prineville District Proposed Solar Applications:

Lisa Clark explained the process and purpose of the agency's programmatic EIS that is currently open for public comment. The BLM is developing an updated plan to guide solar energy development on public lands, Oregon is one of the western states that is being considered for inclusion in the plan. She discussed how this is different than the local application process that the district is working through and explained how it could impact the district process for future solar applications.

Lisa also gave a brief overview of the right-of-way applications that the district is processing for two proposed solar facilities, one Deschutes County and the other mostly in Crook County.

Time for public comment and response:

Cliff Kizer voiced his concerns regarding the solar application process. He explained he's concerned that companies are coming in and tying up the land for a minimal cost up front. He thinks solar developments on public land would significantly change the way the land is being used and would not be in the public's best interest.

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8 a.m. – 12 p.m. in-person and via Zoom
Prineville District Office – 3050 NE 3rd Street, Prineville, OR 97754

Attendance:

RAC: Tom Mottl, Randy Jones, Jerry Brummer, Greg Jackle, Shay White, Susan Koppert, Glenn Burleigh, Brian Sykes, Jim Reiss, Katy Nelson, Mary Fleischmann, Mia Sheppard

Agency Reps: Designated Federal Official Amanda Roberts, Prineville BLM; Wayne Monger, Vale BLM; Joe Aragon, Vale BLM

Agency support: Kaitlyn Webb, Prineville BLM PAO/RAC Coordinator; Larisa Bogardus, Vale BLM; Michael Anderson, Prineville BLM; Nick Weber, Prineville BLM; Natalie Kuntz, Prineville BLM; Monica Morin, Prineville BLM; Jimmie Eisner, Prineville BLM; Chris Ryan, Prineville BLM

Public: Cliff Kizer, public; Anne White, Oregon National Desert Association; Sarah Sherman, National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center

Presentation – Thirtymile Recreation and Travel Management Plan Update:

Chris Ryan provided an update on the district's progress on the Thirtymile Recreation and Travel Management Plan, see attached presentation for details. A few of the recreational improvements that are being evaluated include moving the boat launch, adding infrastructure, and developing a parking area for hunters and boaters. Overall themes for the range of alternatives include no action, a balanced alternative, and a more developed alternative. The district hopes to finalize the alternatives and have the environmental assessment ready for comments by the summer of 2023.

Use of E-bikes was a topic of high interest.

Mia Sheppard commented that a toilet is needed at Thirtymile. She also noted that E-bikes cost \$1,500, allowing their use disenfranchises lower income people since they cannot afford those bikes.

Tom Mottl commented that road access in the winter could create challenges. He was curious what local community members thought of the project. Chris explained most locals support expanding access but worry about overcrowding. Tom also asked if the land would come with any constraints. Chris explained that there would be deed restrictions on grazing, mineral, and wind power rights.

Shay White expressed concerns about people traveling down the steep road, he suggested paving the most treacherous part of the road. Chris explained that the district is evaluating the option of graveling the road and opening line of sight. Shay also asked if there is any other access for Thirtymile. Chris responded that Clarno and Cottonwood provide access. Without this additional boat launch, the river float trip is 70 miles long.

Randy Jones asked about the possibility of scat machines at Thirtymile. Monica Morin responded that unfortunately there is no utility infrastructure at Thirtymile to support a scat machine.

Mary Fleischmann asked if the public could provide input on the alternatives. Chris explained the NEPA process, highlighted the public input opportunities, and clarified that the final decision could be a modification of the proposed alternatives – a mix and match of what is preferred.

Glenn asked about use of the backcountry airstrip nearby. Chris explained that the district evaluated the possibility but decided not to include it because it presented too many safety concerns and would impact Wild and Scenic values.

Presentation – John Day River Updates:

Monica Morin shared information about the district's management of the John Day River corridor, see attached presentation for details. Highlights included updates on the permit system, the updated boater guide that is still in progress, highlights and statistics from the 2022 boater season, and planned projects and goals for the 2023 season.

Amanda Roberts noted that the BLM is proposing to acquire about 4,000 acres along the John Day River near McDonald's Ferry Crossing.

Jim Reiss noted that rolling release for permits will help the guides. He also asked if more campsites will be established between Thirtymile and Cottonwood. The BLM responded that there are lots of places for camping along that stretch, but without shade. Limiting the stay will be an option to open up more camping, some people stay for 14 days.

Glenn Burleigh commented that deeper holes in the river have tons of tires which could be hazardous waste. He also suggested that accommodations be made for people with kids that go tubing on the river.

Susan Koppert asked if the guidebook would be available on printed paper and where it could be purchased. Monica explained the final will be released in 2024, printed and digital will be available.

Mia Sheppard commented that 6PPD can leach into the water from tires which could affect steelhead populations. Tire removal should be priority. She commented that she appreciates the rolling release, but it still isn't helping guides, they still cannot get permits. Use is going down for outfitters. She also noted that cancellations don't help outfitters. Mia commented that the John Day River limits itself because it has inconsistent flows. Monica Morin thanked Mia for her comments and shared that the BLM is aware that the permit system has been a challenge for guides. The district is doing what they can. She noted there is a much greater demand from private boater parties.

Presentation – Visitor Experience Interpretive Planning Effort:

Sarah Sherman shared updates on the ongoing improvements at the Baker County Interpretive Center, see attached presentation for details. The improvements should be complete by summer or fall of 2024.

Wayne Monger noted that the center has been closed for renovation for over a year and the BLM has used this opportunity to reengage with the community and assess the center's relevance. The district is looking to the tribes to incorporate different voices at the center, he asked the RAC to be involved too.

Susan Koppert commented that she visited the center and noticed that the display creates enthusiasm by all visitors, young and old. She asked if there are any public meetings planned, Sarah responded no.

Cliff Kizer noted he hasn't been able to go there for three years and asked why. Sarah explained they were closed for COVID and could not open again because it needed renovations. Cliff urged them to try to open as soon as possible.

Presentation – Crook County Natural Resource Planning Committee:

Tim Deboot shared a history of the Crooke County Natural Resource Planning Committee and explained upcoming projects of interest. The committee started about eight years ago, prompted by a proposal for a new recreational site on the Ochoco National Forest. The committee was appointed in 2018 and they meet monthly. The meetings are open to the public. Tim noted one of the biggest positives of the committee is the reengagement that it's helped to facilitated between the public and land management agencies.

Randy Jones asked multiple questions about juniper removal, Tim shared information from recent research.

Glenn Burleigh suggested that there needs to be more burning in juniper stands for hazardous fuels

reduction projects to be efficient. Tim explained there are risk parameters that agencies must work within. There are ways to use fire and mitigate the risk with some pre-thinning.

Round Table:

Katy commented she thinks there are challenges with collaboration. Commented on harassment in the workplace, specifically in reference to women in wildland fire. She urged federal agencies to pay close attention to fire crews. Katy also referenced the arrest of a burn boss by the Sheriff in Grant County.

Amanda acknowledged that there is work to be done for women in fire. She noted that all federal agencies take a safe, inclusive workplace very seriously. She also shared that federal agencies have made great strides in recent years in this arena.

Shay White asked his fellow council members to refrain from filming presenters out of respect during the RAC meetings, Randy and other council members expressed agreement. Shay also shared some Idaho updates including that the Wallowa Whitman National Forest is installing docks at Cache Creek. They are definitely needed and are a great design because you can move the dock. Northwest River Runners is volunteering to build it all. Getting more people involved with trail crews. HDRC has site-specific people for staging areas.

Tom Mottl shared updates about how the Friends group he participates in has been partnering with the Prineville District BLM. He also shared that FANS has various documents available about birds and plants, he would like to get them at the agency front desks.

Susan Koppert expressed that she was very interested in the John Day River updates. She shared that the solar development proposals raise concerns for her, she is interested in more studies that show the long-term repercussions of solar.

Mary Fleischmann noted that the solar updates were a lot to take in and provides pros for a lot of people. She suggested putting solar panels on the top of buildings.

Jim Reiss expressed an interest in more discussions around housing challenges.

Glenn Burleigh shared some thoughts about fire breaks near wilderness areas and spotted owl habitat. He suggested a boat ride in the upper end of Hells Canyon at the next RAC meeting in June.

Randy Jones expressed his appreciation for the NGO's who participated in the meeting. He also nominated Shay White to be the Vice Chair of the RAC. He hopes to facilitate a formal vote at the next RAC meeting.

Shay White accepted the nomination and expressed gratitude for all he's learned from the RAC.

Council members approved Randy's nomination for Shay as the Vice Chair.

Randy also highlighted the importance of recruiting for the RAC and shared upcoming vacancies. He asked all members to submit two nomination suggestions at the next meeting.

Wayne Monger noted it would be beneficial to outreach for more diverse representation.

Wrap-up:

Randy Jones expressed his interest in the RAC doing a field trip for the next meeting in June.

Glenn Burleigh requested a presentation from an industrial representative regarding solar at the next meeting.

Kaitlyn Webb noted she will be going on a detail at the end of March, Larisa Bogardus will facilitate the June meeting.

Randy Jones asked the Federal representatives when the RAC can expect a decision on the proposed subcommittees, Wayne responded hopefully in mid-June.

Time for public comment and response:

Anne White expressed her appreciation for the opportunity to sit in on the meeting. She was particularly interested in the Thirtymile update.