

April 1, 2025

The Natural Resources Advisory Committee meeting was called to order by Vice-Chair Reid at 6:05 p.m. In attendance were Don Rotell, Aaron Johnston, Nick Schott, Lee Foster, Bruce Rickman, Shane Otley, Merle Reid, Russ Clark, Eric Woodworth, Chad Boyd, and Rob Frank.

Members did the Pledge of Allegiance.

Agenda was accepted by consensus.

Minutes were accepted by consensus. It was suggested that some printed copies of minutes be made available at future meetings.

For old business the group discussed the Blue Mountain Forest Plan draft. There hasn't been a BIC meeting since the last NRAC meeting. Johnston said that there will be public comment on the draft later this spring, and Frank confirmed that USFS plan is to do the roadshow (including in Burns) later this spring to accept comment.

Frank gave a brief update on SB 777 and said that the wolf compensation bill will hopefully pass. Foster gave an update on wolf activity in the northwestern portion of the county. Wildlife services (Kemper) stepped up and helped a lot with that situation. Frank informed the group that the Wolf Compensation Advisory Committee will likely be granted \$52,000 this year compared to \$50,000 last year. The question was asked whether or not the Drewsey crew procured another thermal drone, as they are an effective means of nonlethal deterrence. Rickman commented that he noticed a period of no calving that corresponded to a period of known wolf activity during the breeding season.

Reid gave an update on SB 769. That bill is dead, and although it had extremely high positive testimony, there was discrepancy about whether cougars or drought conditions played a bigger part in wildlife numbers. Boyd asked about the available data and Foster cited a current study taking place in Murderers Creek to establish the effect of forage availability vs predator density.

Boyd gave a brief update on EOARC funding. The federal side should have a better idea of funding later this spring. Frank informed the group that the State Ways and Means Committee roadshow will be in LaGrande on April 11 and that is an opportunity to support or oppose funding of legislative asks. He stated that he will advocate for policies that positively impact the county, including funding of OSU Agricultural Experiment Station (AES).

Don Rotell, field manager of the Burns BLM District was introduced. He mentioned that the Conservation and Public Landscapes Health Rule was not being implemented currently and was not cause for concern, but if there were specific questions the group had about it he could find the answers and get back.

Johnston gave an update on timber. We don't currently have the infrastructure to handle the amount of board feet that the proposed Blue Mountain Forest Plan addresses. Timber work this spring and summer will focus on scorched areas. Reid asked about road closures, and it was agreed that they will likely be closed in the fire area until June at least.

Schott informed the group that APHIS is trying to have applicators on hand so they don't have to go through the bid process to address pests such as Mormon crickets or Grasshoppers. Rotell says the BLM has six 10,000 plus acre treatment areas identified, and are planning for similar scope to last year. Otley informed the group that he advocated for this issue in DC recently. Johnston suggested inviting SWCD representation to our meetings as they carry out much of the work to deal with issues discussed by NRAC. It was agreed by consensus they would be a positive addition. Schott noted that Jason Kesling and Tyler Goss treated the Mormon crickets very well last year, especially the south end of the

county, and noted that they seem to be moving further north each year. Correlation between water and crickets as discussed, and Schott discussed preventative measures that may be administered earlier. He stated he hadn't seen three problem years in a row until last year, and if they're a problem this year that will make four in a row.

Collaboratives gave updates. Johnston asked about moving forward with the Bird Festival in light of the current natural disaster. Rotell stated that the RFPA Summit has been moved to Prineville for this year because of the flood. Boyd mentioned OWRD cancelled the RAC meeting, and he hopes this flood will bring to light the correlation of catastrophic wildfire caused by lack of management and runoff rates. He discussed a study in which a rain simulator used on different terrains showed that lack of understory dramatically increases runoff. Johnston informed the group that the Forest Collaborative has been discussing interest in how riparian areas are managed, and using grazing as a tool for fine fuel reduction. He stated that we need to treat more acres, and that only about 25 percent of project areas are actually treated. He also spoke about the Wildfire Collaborative and their concern with finding funding for a BLM/RFPA liaison. The group agreed it is a valuable position. Johnston spoke about PODs and PLDs (after the meeting he showed maps of the work being done to identify possible fire break lines). Rickman asked if there was adequate funding for projects and Johnston explained how High Desert Partnership has much of its procured federal funding frozen currently. Boyd asked if the Court has taken an official position on the position of RFPA liaison, and Frank state that while official discussion has not taken place on that topic it was evident during the fire reports that position is essential.

For the good of the order Frank brought up the fact that after this year the funding will have run out for Wildlife Services. The group recognizes the importance of that position to all county citizens, and Reid, Otley, and Rickman volunteered to help the court with contacting potential partners. Boyd informed the group of Science in the Sagebrush Step, a range camp that serves as the only field learning opportunity for many of the attending college students, that will be taking place this spring. Clark updated the group that almost 2,000 coyotes have been removed from the county, and the group agreed that there has to be an aerial component to the county's wildlife control plan.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:31 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Rob Frank