

January 6, 2026

The Natural Resources Advisory Committee meeting was called to order by Chair Svejcar at 6:04 p.m. Members in attendance were Jason Kesling, Nick Schott, Lisa Grant, Don Rotell, Chad Boyd, Russ Clark, Jesse Svejcar, Bruce Rickman, Josh Giles, Aaron Johnston, Josey Wilson, and Lee Foster.

Members did the Pledge of Allegiance.

Agenda was approved by unanimous consent.

Johnston moved to approve minutes as read, Rickman seconded. Motion passed by general consent.

Schott was nominated for chair and accepted. Schott was elected chairman by general consent. Grant was nominated vice chair and accepted. Grant was elected vice chair by general consent.

In old business there wasn't much to say about the already discussed visit from Department of State Lands. The group discussed the Southern Prescribed Burn Association. The group agreed that it would be an important component of emergency planning. Johnston discussed the liability protection it would offer landowners, and said ODF would help get it up and going. He would try to bring it up at future Wildfire Collaborative meetings. Boyd suggested Micah Schmidt with OSU may be a resource.

In new business, the group discussed the BIC/Blue Mountain Forest Plan update. Giles informed the group that in the Malheur Forest 160 million board feet of green timber had been sold and were still standing. Hazard trees were being removed, by paid contract from USFS. There is nowhere to take the timber because of limited mills in Eastern Oregon. There is a 2.4 million board foot hazard sale in Emmigrant and it is only getting hauled because they got a grant.

In terms of Grey Wolf status update, the group was informed that the Pet and Livestock Protection Act passed the House of Representatives in December and would have to make it through the Senate to remove the wolf from the Endangered Species list.

The group discussed Wildlife Services (WS). Foster suggested reaching out to conservation partners for funding, and cited the work our Wildlife Services agency does with beaver management as an example for how the program may align with other groups goals. Svejcar noted how beneficial raven control has been for all bird populations, as ravens are predatory. Rickman lamented that the NRAC has secured funding for the program in the past, but it is a lot of work. Kesling suggested considering tact when engaging conservation groups for Wildlife Services funding; i.e. don't lead with we want to kill animals to save animals. Showcase the amount of work WS does towards conservation practices. Foster agreed, and suggested focusing on how WS benefits their mission.

The group discussed Natural Resource coordination/MOU. T. Svejcar suggested to make a proposal, since the USFS chief acknowledged the need for local input, rather than wait for them to offer up assistance. A Natural Resource liaison position would improve consistency in County/Federal interactions, and the RFPA liaison position was a good model. Rotell informed the group that the RFPA liaison position is not expected to be maintained, but was very effective. Boyd stated that a position like suggested would bring continuity and better ability to relay past successes and failures. Grant commented on how important it is for the County to comment on NEPAs. Rotell said he would double check to make sure the County is on the NEPA mailing list. Giles said the USFS has changed its process and you have to elect to be on the mailing list. Johnston spoke of a Community Wildfire Firewise Coordinator grant his collaborative has been working on. T. Svejcar said he would apply some of his expertise to drafting a proposal for the position, and Giles expressed interest in brainstorming with T. Svejcar.

Collaborative updates were given. Johnston, with Forest Restoration and Wildfire collaboratives, informed the group that the Stinking Water projects have been completed. They are working on implementing more fuels treatments and fuel breaks. He stated that there are more opportunities for cross boundary collaboration. They have been working on a post fire mitigation plan with SWCD which includes hazard tree removal, seeding, and spraying.

Wilson, who represents Wetlands and CCP collaboratives, was introduced to the group. She informed the group that the Wetlands group has been working on improving flood irrigation infrastructure and water dispersement management to benefit agriculture and ecosystems. 31 restoration projects have been funded for work after the '25

flood. The CCP has been focusing on exploring virtual fencing usage and trying to engage more landowners in the CCP process.

Agency updates were given. Kesling informed the group that NRCS has some program deadlines coming up on January 15 that would help producers. SWCD has been working with the USFS and BLM on restoring fences and thinning trees after the '24 fires. If landowners want to do conservation work, Farm Service Agency and SWCD can point them in the right direction.

Boyd informed the group that the Experiment Station is still under a federal hiring freeze, but they've gotten creative with state partners for staffing needs.

Rotell (BLM) informed the group that this is a period of great change, and are also in a hiring freeze. He discussed the Unified Fire Service, a separate agency focused on suppression, which may combine Harney County with other neighbors. T. Svejcar asked if it had been approved, because there was talk that Congress may not fund the agency. Rotell also informed the group that the Kiger and Riddle horse gathers are a priority for this year, even if it takes an emergency gather in spite of the injunction which may not be decided until summer '26. He also informed that the BLM will be able to use effective herbicides previously not allowed by their agency and use unmanned monitoring.

Giles (USFS) informed the group that the hazard tree contract had been awarded to Iron Triangle. There would be fencing contracts coming out soon, focusing on internal pasture fences. They are working with SWCD for 326 miles of external fences. Kesling asked how FSA funding will work, and stated that all of the agencies need to work together. There may be grazing on the USFS ground affected by the '24 fires in the upcoming grazing season. Grant asked if there was any opportunity to move internal fence lines to more appropriate locations. Boyd asked if there was a possibility for virtual fencing. Svejcar stated that many producers are concerned about data security, to which Boyd replied that it's secure and whomever owns the collar owns the data. Giles said no producers have expressed interest.

Foster (ODFW) informed the group that there is a resident pair of wolves on the west side around Dry Mountain, including OR183, and there are many other uncollared wolves around. Many Steens Mountain area landowners have been having trouble with cougar populations. The mule deer hunt area boundaries have been finished, and new maps are for sale at ODFW or County Planning. He discussed the fact that the new units do affect the Land Owner Preference (LOP) program. He discussed the upcoming legislation that would provide alternative funding for the agency via the TLTI; if it were to pass it would be a huge increase the agencies budget, and among other things, could more proactively work to prevent ESA listings.

For the good of the order, Kesling brought up the House Bill last session to cut juniper; \$580,000 granted. SWCD has helped thin 4000 acres of junipers, and in one location, a spring re-emerged that hadn't flowed for 60 years. They piled and burned the cleared trees.

Schott adjourned the meeting at 7:39 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Rob Frank