

Minutes

Crook County Natural Resources Committee

May 13, 2026

Committee Members Present: Bill McCormack, Frank Porfily, Lynne Breese, Calista Songstad, Tim Deboodt, Melinda Kestler, Steve McGuire, Cliff Kiser, Mike Lunn, Laura York

Members Absent: Andy Gallagher, Steve McGuire, Kim Vogel

Guests Present: Robbie Piehl (FS), Jodie Schiffman (Oregon Living with Fire), Susie Hermreck (Commissioner), Jeff Marszal (FS), Stephanie McKinney (BLM), Suz Burke (BLM Public Affairs), Greg Jackle (ODFW), Rika Ayotte (Deschutes Land Trust)

Public Present: John Breese, Gayle Hunt, Tom Casselman, Gayle Casselman

Meeting was called to order @ 1:00 p.m. by Vice Chair Lynne Breese

Pledge of Allegiance

Minutes: Bill moved to approve the March 11, 2026, meeting as presented. Cliff Seconded. All committee members voted aye, none voted no, passed unanimously.

Agency Update: Jeff Marszal, Ochoco Forest Supervisor provided the updates. He shared that the organizational reorganization for the Forest Service is slowly moving forward. Known changes include the National Office which will be located in Salt Lake City, Utah, with a much smaller office remaining in Washington, DC. Regional offices will be closed, and State offices will be established. Oregon's office will be located in Salem. Forest Supervisors will report to the State Forester. Forest Research and Development will be consolidated into fewer locations, and run out of Fort Collins, CO. The number of research sites is yet to be determined.

As a part of the reorganization, more decision making will be moved to the Forest Supervisor. Fire management for now is staying with the Forest Service. Congress is forming a committee to make decisions and recommendations for any changes to this structure. Cliff asked if there would be any changes to fire fighting strategies and coordination with USDI Fire Service. Jeff indicated that there would be no changes and significant alignment will remain. Frank asked about the new construction at the Lamonta site. Jeff said that construction is progressing and it will be the new home of the Fire Division. Jeff shared that all fire fighting positions are now filled and they are ready for fire season.

In regards to fire restoration activities, the Forest has received 2.9 million dollars (6.9 Million total) for fire recovery projects. The Forest has hired 7 seasonal positions.

Jeff reviewed the Update handout (attached).

Bill asked about the large collections of pinecones in the Maury Mtns. Jeff shared that was a business that paid for a permit to collect.

Frank asked about where the logs being sold off the forest were going. Jeff said most of the pine was being trucked to Gilcrest and the fir to Molalla.

Stephanie McKinney provided the BLM update. Suz Burke, public affairs officer, introduced herself. Stephanie shared significant leadership changes in the Prineville District Office. Amanda Roberts, District Manager, has retired. Kyle Hensley will be acting manager. Stephanie will add Acting Field Manager to her duties for the Central Oregon Resource Area. Mike Decker will be taking an interim leadership role in the Vale District and Lisa Clark will be returning to her role as Field Manager for the Deschutes Resource Area. At the State Level, many retirements there as well including Barry Bushue, State Director, has retired.

The US Wildland Fire Service is now up and running. All USDI agencies are participating. One of the benefits of the new organization is streamlined decision making.

On the National level, BLM has rescinded the Public Lands Rule and with that, changes to the ACECs. Also, BLM is entering a 60-day comment period for updated Grazing Rules.

On the District, Stephanie shared that the Integrated Invasive Weed Management EA will be out in about 2 weeks for public comment. A right of way easement has been granted to the Flat Rock Road District (Juniper Canyon area). The Prineville District's Forester position is vacant with no known fill date.

Camp fire closures are now in effect.

Discussion was held on the South Fork Crooked River Field Trip hosted by the BLM on April 30. Stephanie asked the Committee to share with the BLM what role the NRAC would like to have with the BLM in the future. BLM is interested in knowing what its issues of concern are, what are the priorities the NRAC sees and what type of projects the NRAC would like to participate in.

Susie commented on the field day and said the new regulations being considered would require the BLM to identify the causes of streambank alternation, just noting it was occurring would not be adequate. Melinda asked if the new grazing regulations would have any impact on current grazing permits, specifically making any modifications to the permits. Stephanie said she did not anticipate any permit changes or added requirements to existing permits. Mike talked about the need for the County to review and comment on the new Grazing Rules. Mike also expressed frustration that there seemed to be confusion

between Rangeland Health Standards and Proper Functioning and Condition (PFC) and determination of upward trends. In response to Stephanie's questions to the Committee about its interests, Cliff shared that the Committee would like to be involved in project development, the time that projects are being formulated, before scoping, before alternative are being developed. He emphasized that the interest is at the point that ideas are being developed.

Greg Jackle (ODFW) reported that there are 2 more days to apply for controlled hunts, deer and elk. He shared that sage grouse surveys this spring included flights over the Paulina PAC. 10 new leks were identified and that population numbers look good. Greg talked about the cyclical nature of the bird's population numbers and that we are currently in the upside of that cycle.

Greg shared that the Game Commission will be holding their June meeting in Redmond, June 26. On June 25th, there will be a tour of the southeast part of the County and it is open to the public. Transportation will not be provided. Susie asked if the juniper cutting was helping with sage grouse recovery. Greg said that he believed it was.

Presentations:

Robbie Piehl, District Ranger shared a presentation on the restoration efforts now going on for the 2024 fires. His PowerPoint presentation is attached to these minutes. Melinda asked if the FS was spraying glyphosate to grow more timber. Robbie shared that he was not aware of this practice on the Ochoco.

Rika Ayotte, Executive Director, Deschutes Land Trust gave a presentation to the Committee in regard to the Land Trust, its mission and current work. A copy of her presentation is attached to these minutes.

In Crook County, the DLT owns and is doing the restoration work on the Ochoco Preserve, across the river from the City of Prineville's wetlands project. Rika reported that phase 3 of the restoration project will begin in 2026/27. To date, with purchase and restoration costs, total project value is \$12 million to date. Major funding sources for this project are grants from Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) and the Bureau of Reclamation's Water Smart Program.

In addition to ownership, the Trust also works with landowners in providing a mechanism for conservation easements. In Crook County, as example of this work with the project with Aspen Valley Ranch. The DLT is also involved in mitigation work. This work is done in conjunction with ODFW when development projects are required to do wildlife mitigation

work as a condition of that project's approval. John Breese asked if the solar developments being built in the Powell Butte area are required to do mitigation. Rika said yes they are required to do mitigation. Greg Jackle shared that in Crook County, the County requires mitigation to be done within Crook County. Frank asked how the DLT dealt with juniper. Rika said the DLT has done juniper thinning of small diameter trees and in areas where wildfire has occurred, they are concerned about the increase in annual grasses.

Good of the Order:

Mike talked about the need for the County to respond to BLM's proposed grazing rule changes. He suggested that the Committee create a subcommittee to review the proposed rules and make recommendations to the whole committee for support from the County. After discussion, Lynne appointed Mike Lunn, Melinda Kestler, Cliff Kiser and Laura York. She appointed Mike to chair the committee. The subcommittee will identify their first meeting date and notify the public.

Cliff moved to adjourn the meeting. Laura seconded. All voted yes, there were no, no votes. Motion carried unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 2:50 p.m.



**Crook County Natural Resources Advisory
Committee**

Ochoco National Forest & Crooked River
National Grassland

May 13, 2026

I. Overview

The Ochoco National Forest & Crooked River National Grassland continues to advance priority work across the unit, with a strong emphasis on post-2024 fire recovery and implementation activities. The Forest received \$2,983,000 in Burned Area Recovery (BAR) funding and approximately \$6.5 million in Disaster Recovery funds to support restoration and stabilization efforts across eight fires from the 2024 season. This work will remain a top priority moving into the 2026 field season.

Staff are transitioning fully into field season operations, with implementation underway across timber, fuels, and restoration programs. Seasonal employees are onboarding and supporting increased operational capacity across the Forest. Ongoing coordination with partners and stakeholders continues as projects move from planning into implementation.

II. 2026 Fire

Fire preparedness staffing remains at expected levels for the 2026 season. Resources include multiple engine modules, initial attack personnel, and interagency support coordinated through the Central Oregon Fire Management Service (COFMS).

III. Projects and Forest Management

- North Slope Vegetation Management Project: Currently in the analysis phase. focused on expanded timber production, wildfire risk reduction, and improved forest health across the North Slope on the Paulina Ranger District.
- Upper Trout/Bridge Creek: Currently in the analysis phase. focused on expanded timber production, wildfire risk reduction, and improved forest health across the North Slope on the lookout Mountain Ranger District.
- 3 Fires Reforestation Initiative: This initiative will replant native, fire-adapted species over several years within high-mortality areas of the 2024 Crazy Creek, Wiley Flat, and Rail Ridge Fire footprints. Priority areas include locations with greater than 75 percent tree mortality. A decision was signed on November 11, 2025.
- Lower Derr Restoration Project: This project aims to improve watershed health while





supporting long-term grazing benefits in the Jackson and Derr Creek areas. Planned treatments include beaver dam analogs, native riparian plantings, large woody debris placement, meadow restoration, and fencing improvements. A decision was signed on September 9, 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 includes in-stream placement of wood and rock, gully filling, construction of beaver dam analogs, and planting of diverse upland and riparian species. The in-stream portion of the project has been completed.
- **Longer Stewardship Agreement:** This partnership project with the Oregon Wildlife Foundation includes commercial and non-commercial thinning and hand piling of slash. Work is being completed adjacent to the Williams Prairie and Upper North Fork Crooked River restoration areas.
- **Mill Creek and North Fork Crooked River Projects:** Implementation will occur over the next several years.
- **Jackson Fuel Break Project:** A decision was signed in April 2025. Treatments are scheduled to begin during the upcoming season.
- **Sunflower Restoration Project:** Two thinning contracts covering approximately 1,600 acres began in 2024. Operations are nearing completion.
- Discussion has been initiated with Oregon Department of Forestry and the Natural Resource Conservation Service on a potential Joint Chiefs Proposal covering private lands immediately adjacent to both the North Slope and Upper Trout/Bridge Creek outyear planning projects.

IV. Timber Sales

- **Barney Deck Sale** – Complete (decks hauled)
- **Branch** – 50% complete (timber cut and hauled to date)
- **Core** – 75% complete (timber cut and hauled to date)
- **Coyote** – Timber felling, skidding, and processing operations have been completed. Log hauling is ongoing along the Drake Creek (Road 16) corridor, and site clean-up is being conducted.
- **Detour Firewood** – Anticipated to be offered for bid soon
- **Dome** – Complete (timber cut and hauled)
- **Grassland Deck Sales** – Anticipated to be offered soon
- **Loco Deck Sale** – Complete (decks hauled)
- **Longer** – Logging operations are expected to resume in early May.
- **Longest** – 50% complete (timber cut and hauled to date)





United States Department of Agriculture

- Marks Creek Fire Hazard Tree Removal Salvage – Logging operations have been completed.
- Piper – 40% complete (timber cut and hauled to date)
- Pond Deck Sale – Near completion (decks hauled)
- Remaze – In sale preparation; anticipated offering in early 2026
- Rail Decks – 75% complete (decks hauled to date)
- Roba Salvage – Complete (timber cut and hauled)
- Slab – Anticipated to be offered in January
- Shake –Logging operations are expected to begin around mid-May, with log hauling to follow shortly after. Haul routes will utilize Forest Road 33 south to Highway 26.
- Speaker – Sold; operations have not yet started

To sign-up for project notifications, please visit our website,

<https://nfs.fs2c.usda.gov/r06/ochoco/projects/signup>. For more information for all current planning projects please visit <https://www.fs.usda.gov/r06/ochoco/projects>



Forest Service



Forest Service

U.S. Department of Agriculture

Ochoco National Forest Restoration & Recovery Efforts

Reforestation Success and Post-2024 Fire Recovery

1

Reforestation Accomplishments

- 3,297 acres of conifer-related trees planted
- 2,874 acres of in-house planting efforts
- An additional 423 acres were completed through an ODF GNA contract



2

Partnership & Program Success

- Expanded capacity through partnership
- Combined efforts resulted in planting accomplishments above the established spring target
- Work supported long-term forest recovery, watershed protection, and future forest resilience

3



Forest
Service

Post-2024 Fire Recovery Funding



- Approximately \$6.5 million in disaster recovery funding
- Approximately \$3 million in Burned Area Recovery funding
- Funding supports efforts on the Paulina and Lookout Mountain Ranger Districts

4

Recovery & Community Coordination

- Prioritizing work to return grazing allotments to use
- Funding is being directed into agreements with local Soil and Water Conservation Districts
- Maximum permittee involvement and local coordination
- Additional support allocated to youth work crews

5

Looking Ahead



- Coordinated effort
- Investment in forest recovery, watershed resilience, and community partnerships
- Work will take place throughout the 2026 and beyond

6





DESCHUTES
LAND
TRUST

Conserving Land for Central Oregon

Deschutes Land Trust

Conservation. Community. Caring for the land.

DESCHUTESLANDTRUST.ORG



Our Mission

The Deschutes Land Trust's mission is to conserve and care for the lands and water that sustain Central Oregon, so local communities and the natural world can flourish together for generations to come.

Deschutes Land Trust





Who we are

By the Numbers



Total Fee Title: 10,476
Total Easements: 8,266
Total Conserved Acres: 18,742



Members: 1800
Five Rivers Society Members: 300
Annual Program Attendees: 1500+



Staff: 18
Board: 17
Active Volunteers: 447



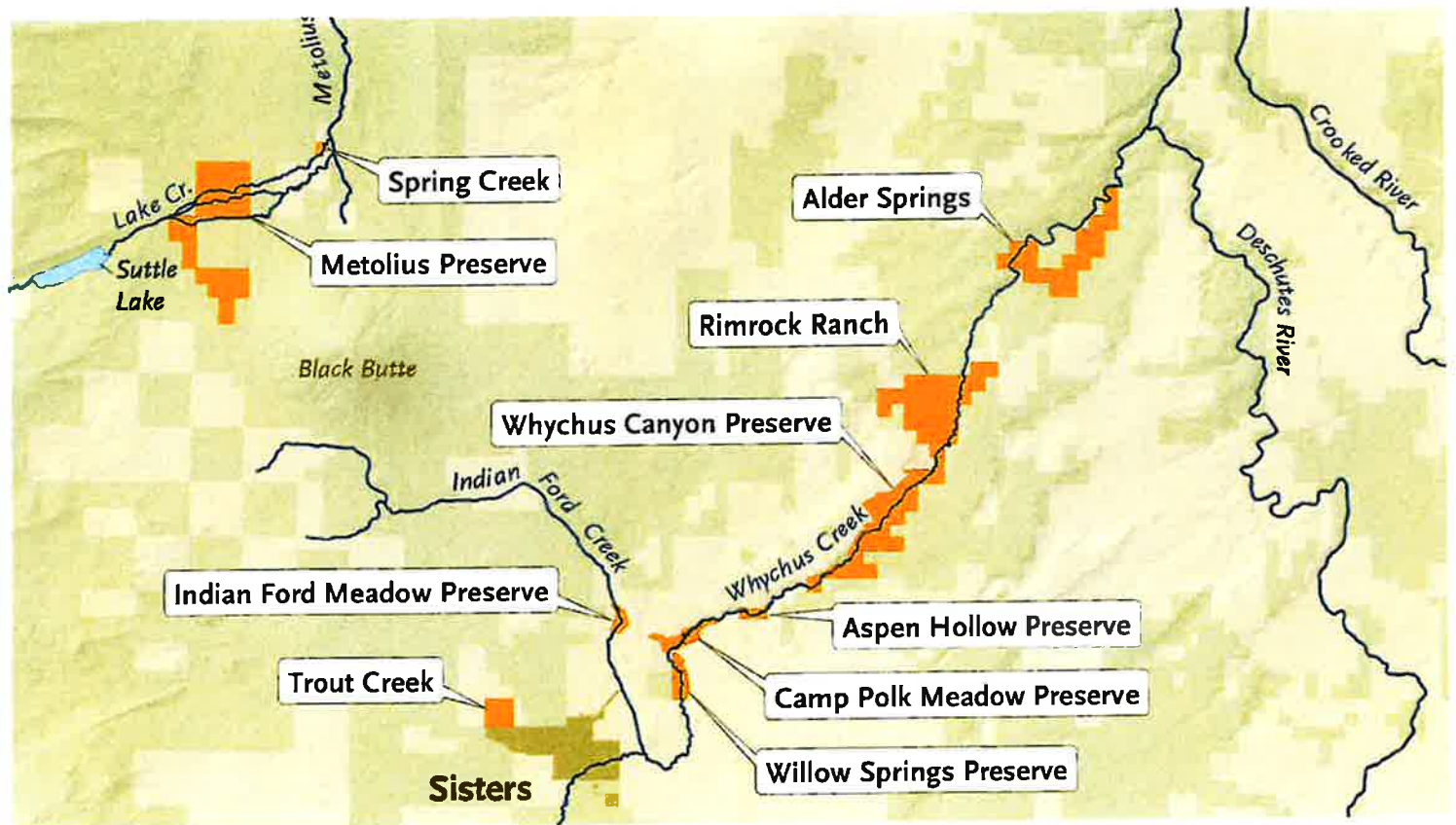
Miles of Stream Restored: 10+
Acres of Forest Restoration: 1600+
Acres of Upland Restoration: 2000+
Miles of Trail: 20

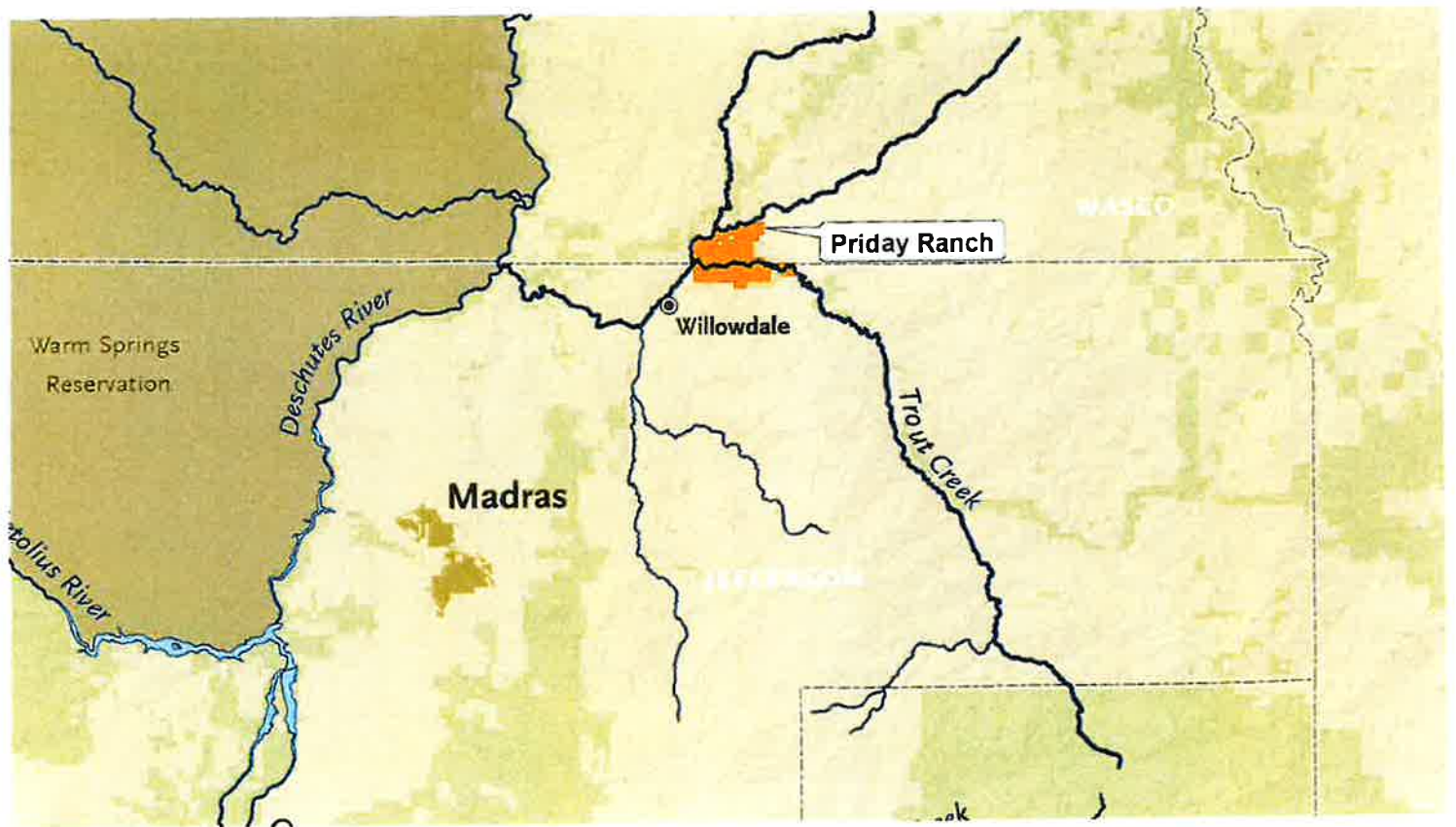


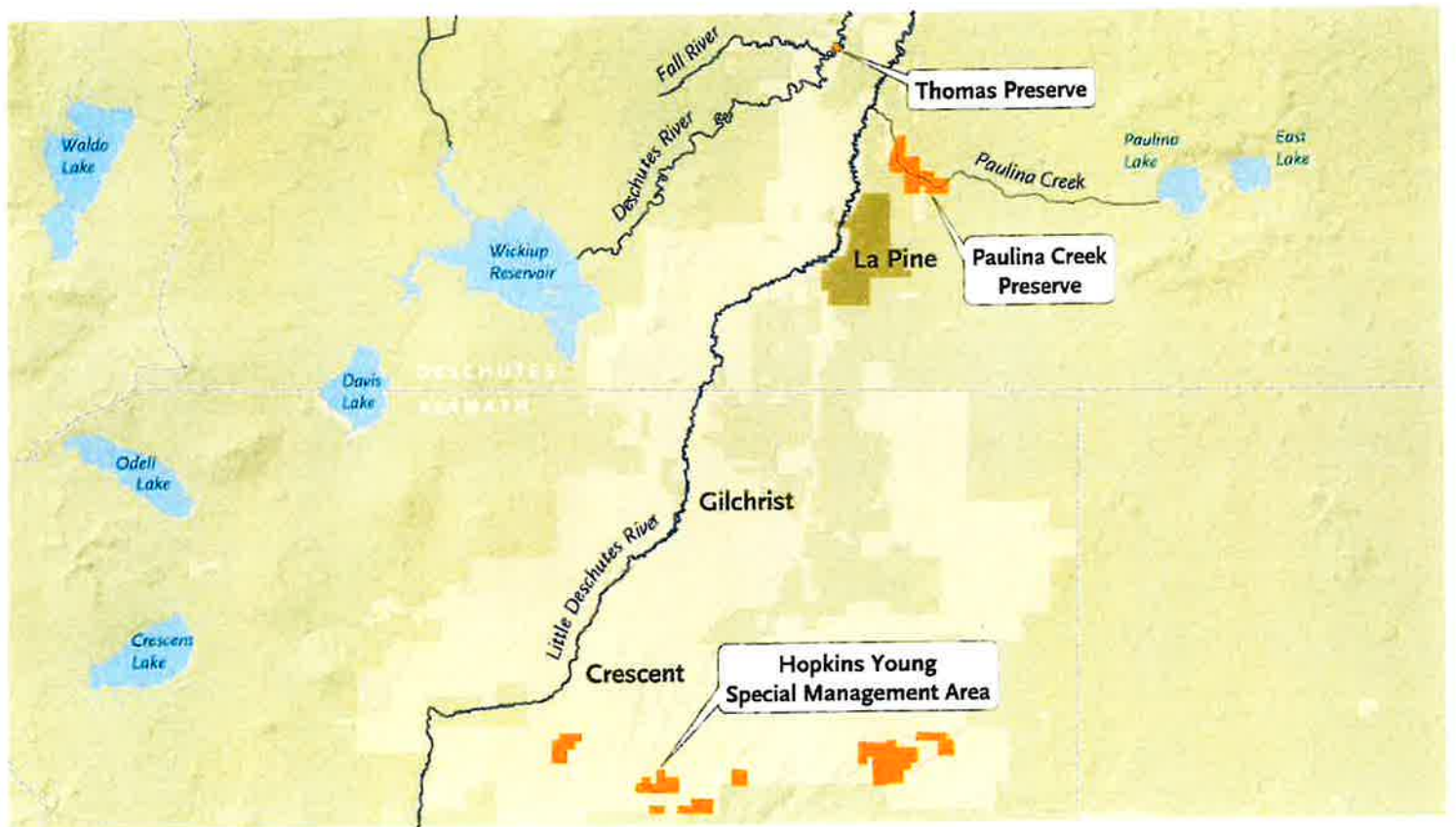
Where we work

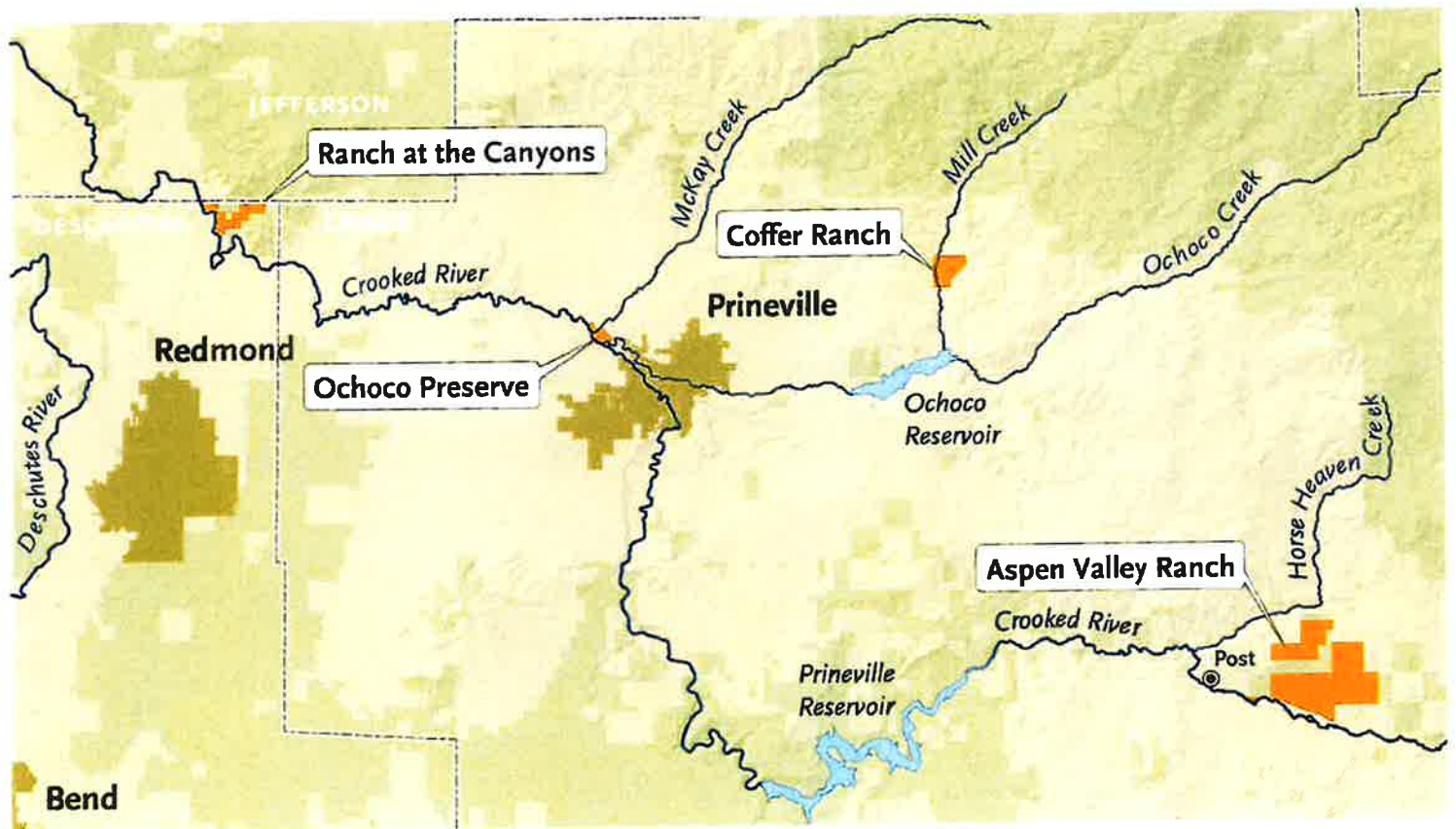
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A close-up photograph of a monarch butterfly with vibrant orange wings and black veins, perched on the tip of a person's finger. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green and yellow. A dark green horizontal bar is overlaid across the middle of the image, containing the title text.

How we conserve land

Conservation Plan

- Climate Resiliency: Protect lands that make our communities and native wildlife and plants more resilient to climate change.
- Ecological Integrity: Protect lands that preserve ecological integrity, connect habitats, and support vulnerable species.
- Community Values: Protect lands for cultural significance, community health, economic and other community values.



We Partner With:



Tribes



**Cities and
Counties**



**Land
Conservation
Community**



**Agencies,
and NGOs**

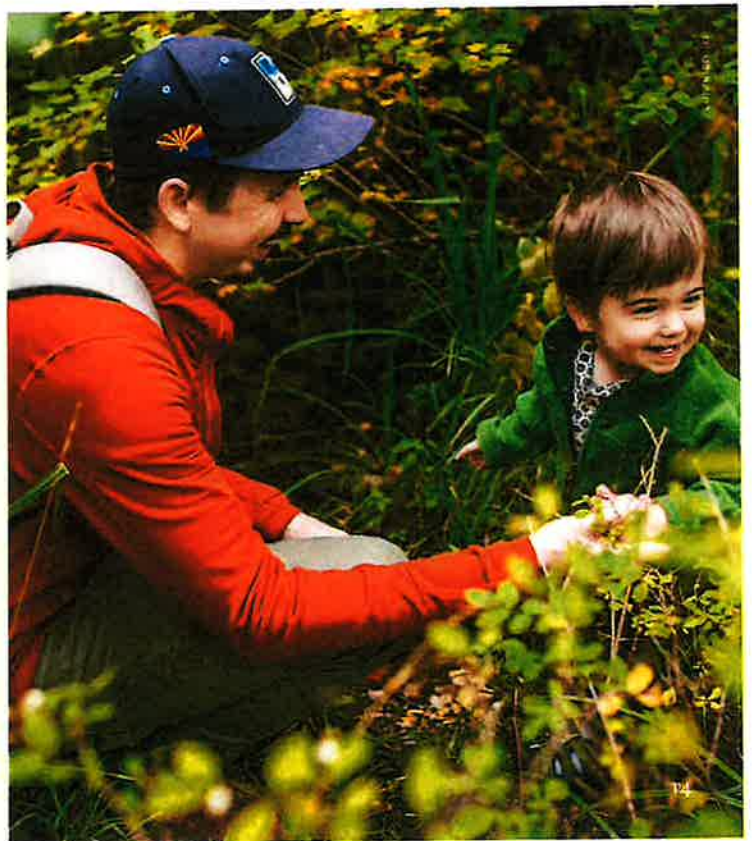


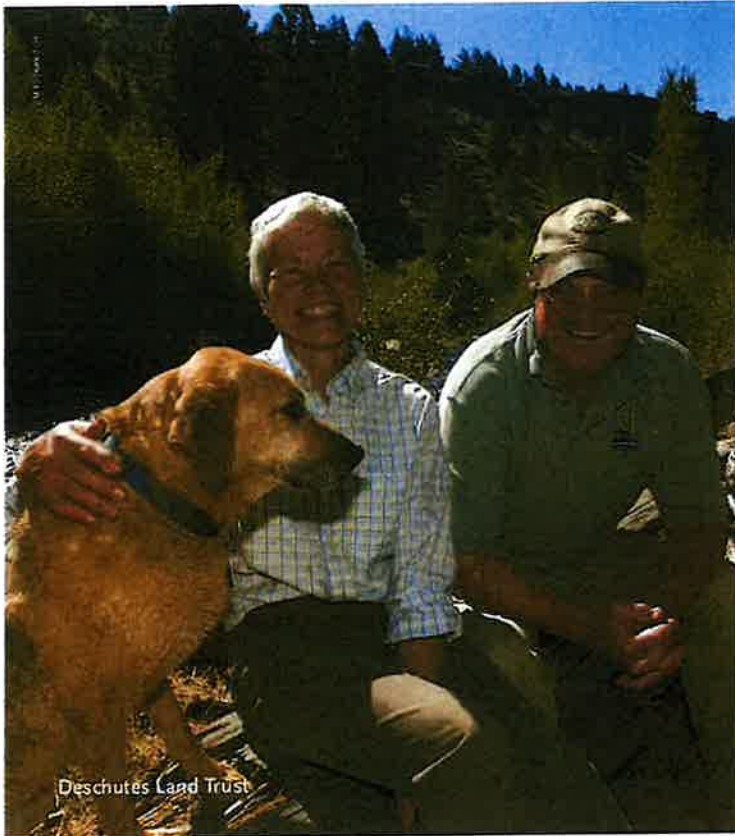
Community Preserves

Lands protected for plants and animals, cultural significance, community health, and other community values.

They are there for you to enjoy and explore either on your own or on a guided tour!

Deschutes Land Trust





Conservation Easements

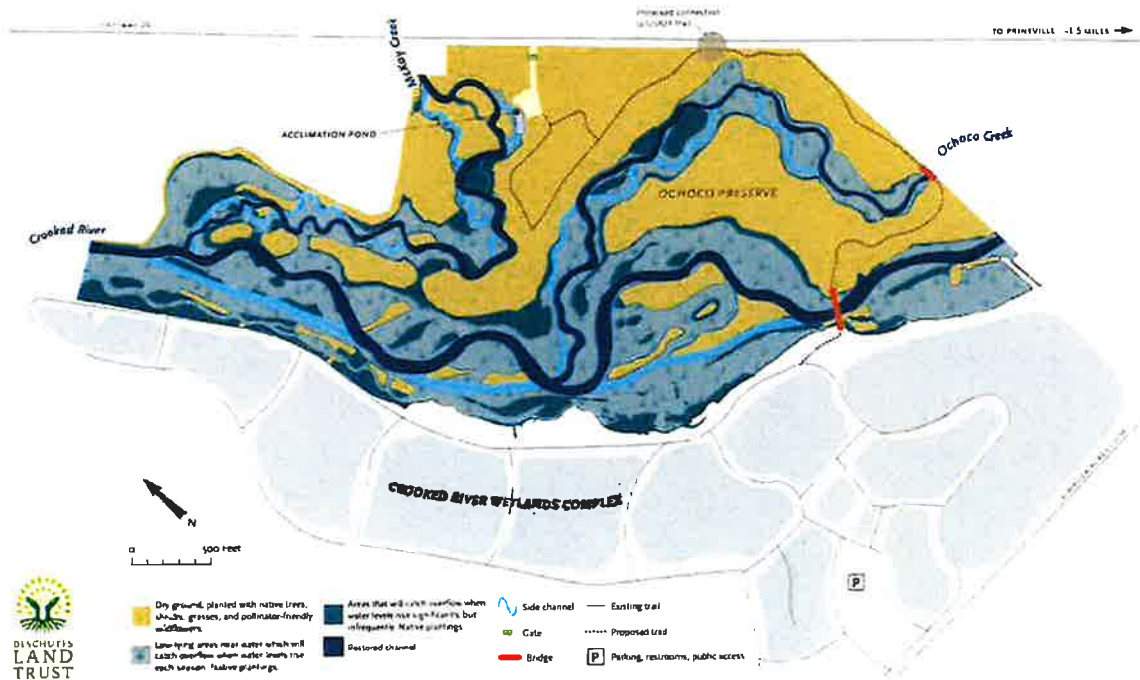
A voluntary agreement which allows a private landowner to own their land and protect natural resources.



Community Preserves

Deschutes Land Trust

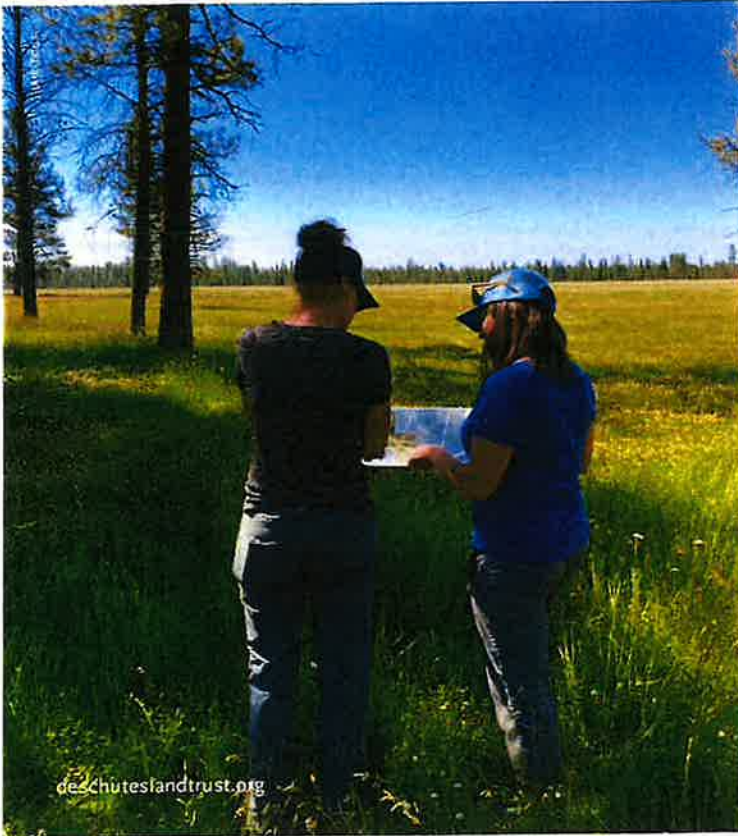
Ochoco Preserve Project











What's Next

- Implementing Phase 3 in 2026
- Building 3 miles of trail connecting downtown Prineville with Crooked River Wetlands Complex.
- Robust public access and programs in 2026/2027!



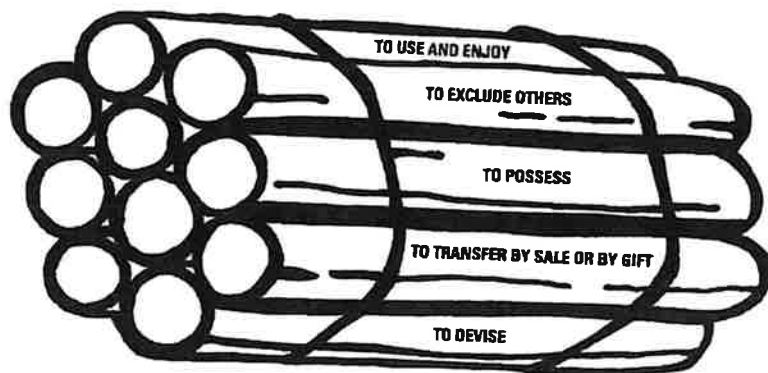


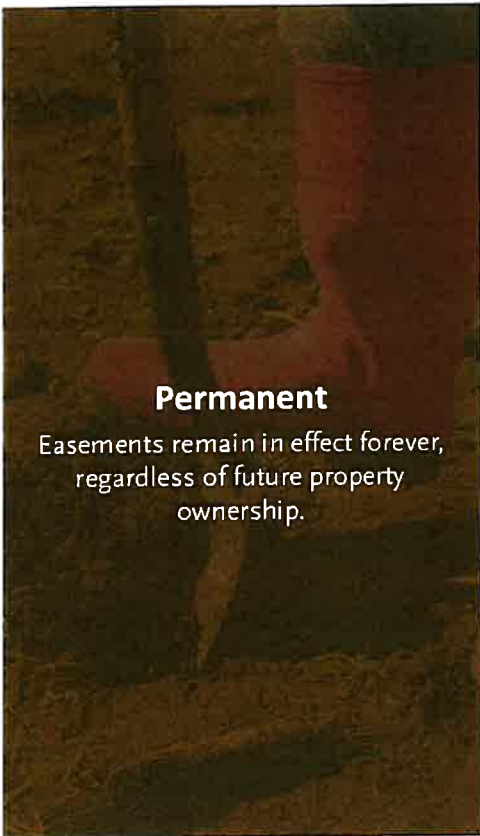
Working Lands Easements

Working land easements allow farmers and ranchers to:

- Permanently protect their land from development and fragmentation
- Continue agricultural and forestry production
- Get cash from their real estate without selling off or developing parcels— this can be helpful for succession planning or business expansion.
- Reduce the property value, making it more affordable to the next generation
- Protect important habitat for fish, wildlife, and native plants.

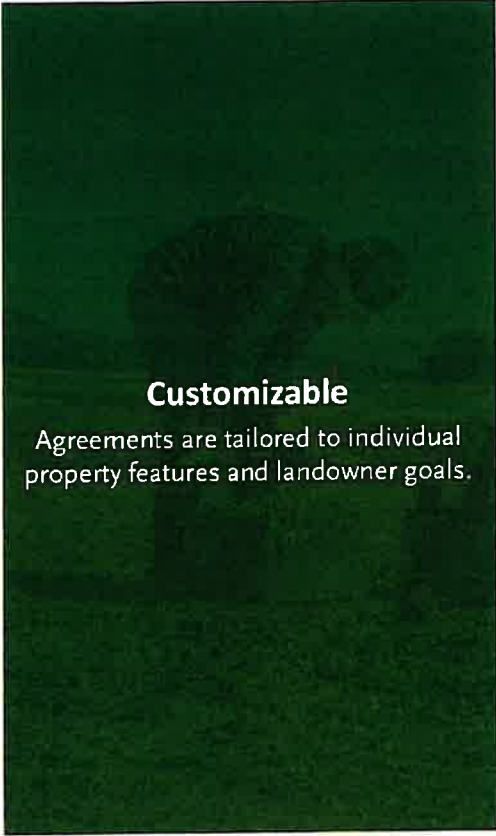






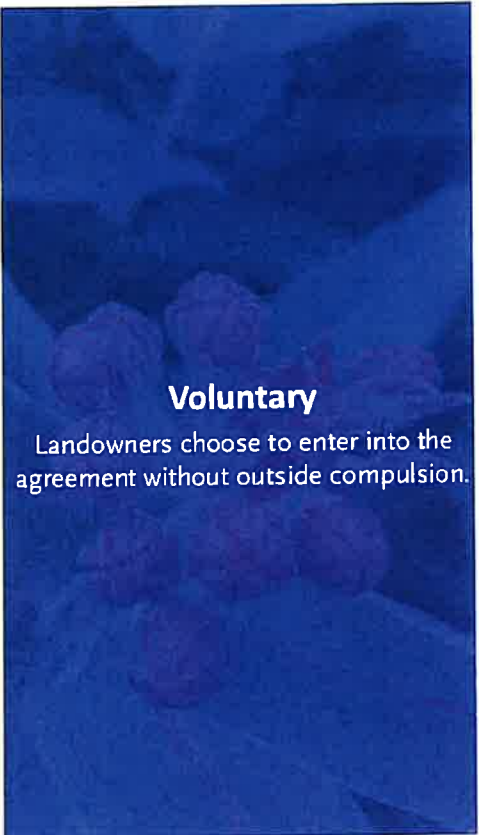
Permanent

Easements remain in effect forever, regardless of future property ownership.



Customizable

Agreements are tailored to individual property features and landowner goals.



Voluntary

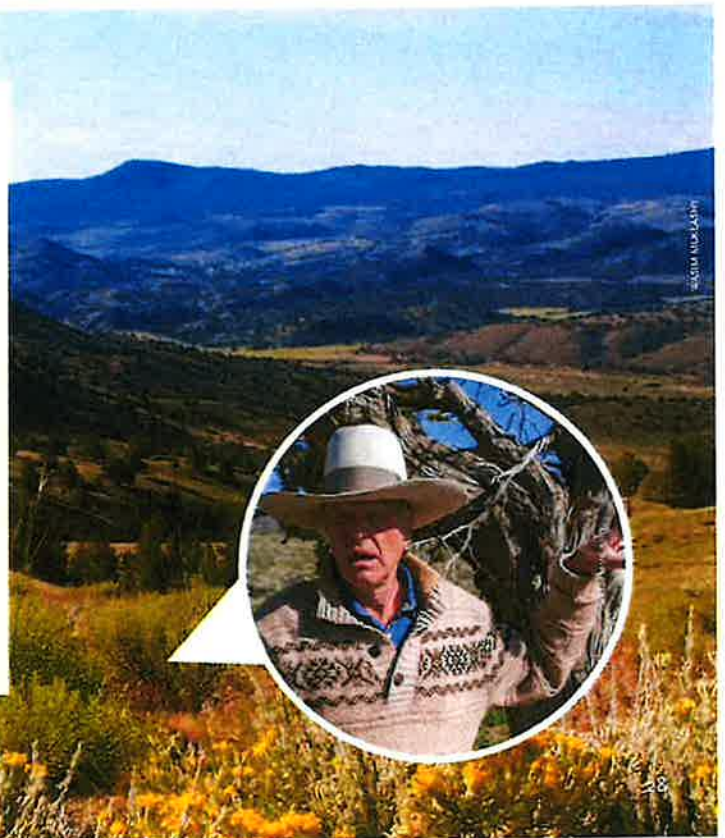
Landowners choose to enter into the agreement without outside compulsion.

Cash	By selling a conservation easement, a landowner can turn equity into cash that can be used for business investment, succession planning, retirement, or paying off a mortgage.
Income Tax Benefits	A landowner can donate all or part of the value of a conservation easement and receive a federal charitable income tax deduction in the year of the gift and carry it forward an additional 15 years.
Bargain Sale	A bargain sale is the sale of a conservation easement for less than fair market value. It is sometimes called a partial donation and can generate both cash and income tax deduction for a landowner.
1031 Exchange	Income from the sale of a conservation easement can qualify for §1031 tax-deferral when proceeds are used to purchase another property
Estate Tax Benefits	A landowner or their heirs can reduce their estate taxes by selling or donating a conservation easement.

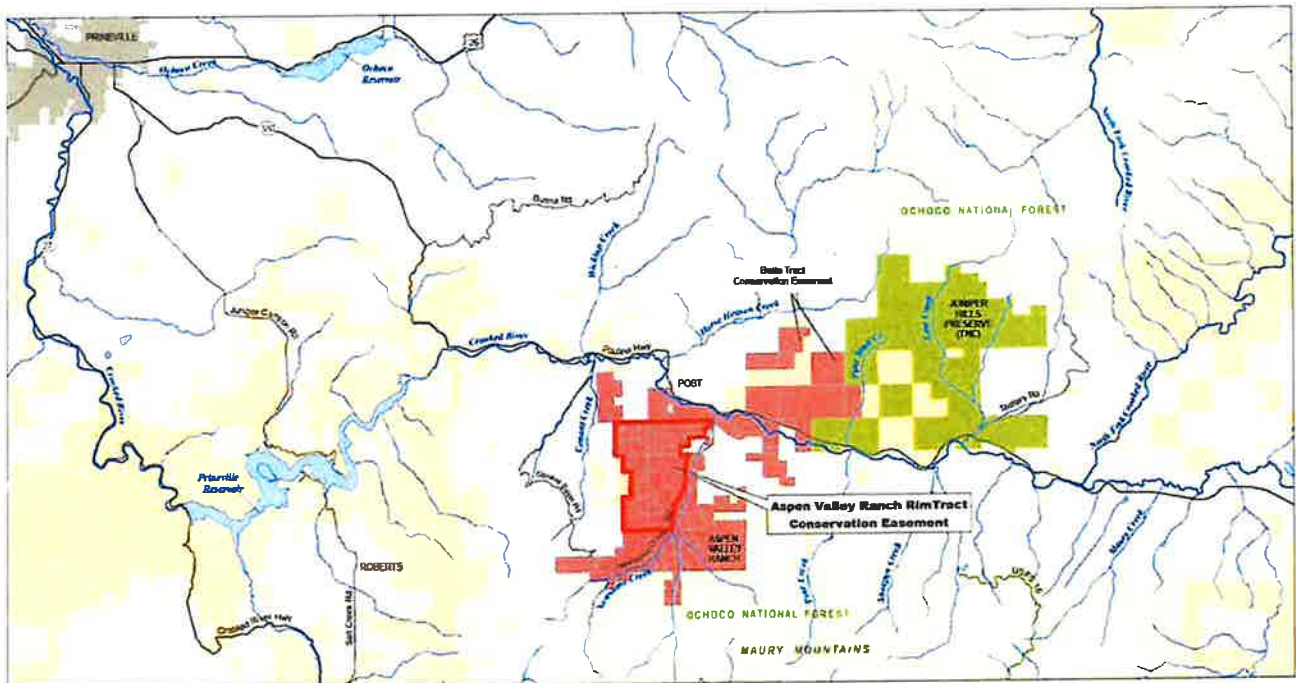
Aspen Valley Ranch

- 18,000-acre working cattle ranch near Post.
- 3 Phase Conservation Easement
 - Prohibits partitioning
 - Prohibits development (eg. mining, roads, buildings, etc)
- Will be completed in 2027
- Funding provided by:
 - NRCS ACEP-ALE
 - OAHP
 - Rocky Mt Elk Foundation
 - Solar Mitigation – Millican Solar
 - Healy Foundation

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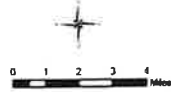
Deschutes Land Trust

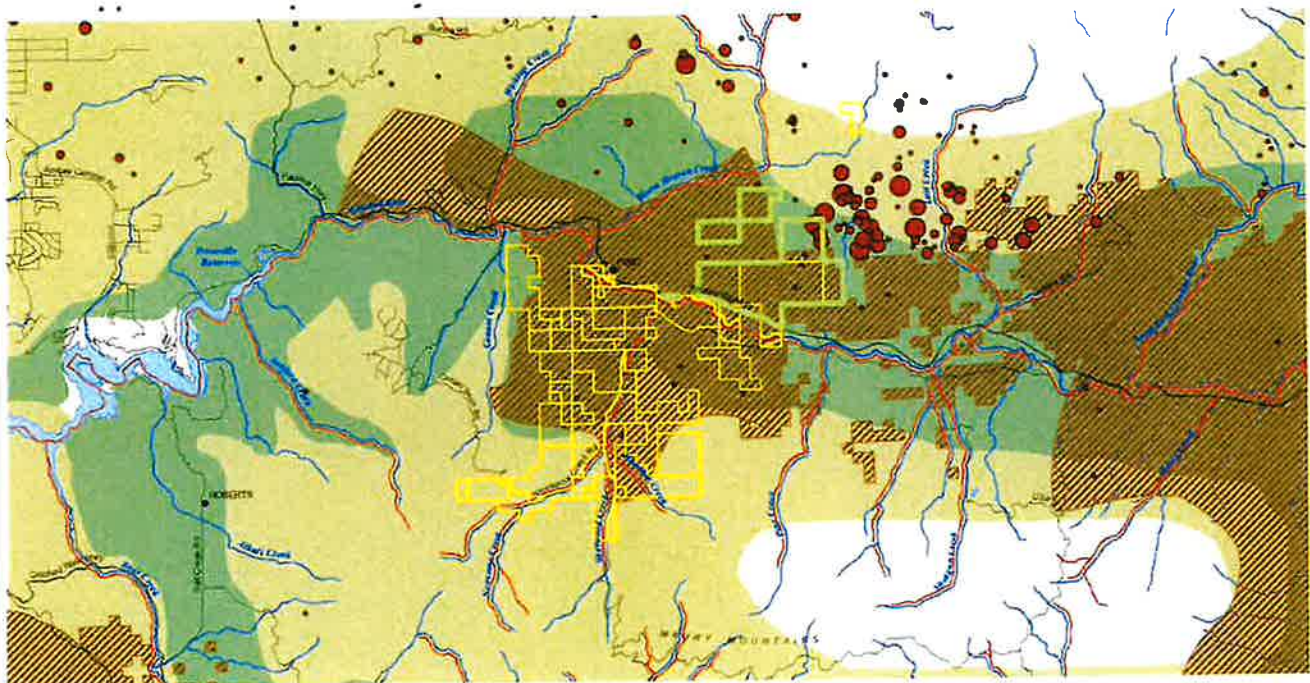


Map by G. Gurnea, 2007/2008
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- | | | |
|---|---|--|
|  Aspen Valley Ranch RimTract Conservation Easement |  Bureau of Land Management |  Aspen Valley Ranch |
|  Bureau of Reclamation |  City of Prineville |  Private land |
|  U.S. Forest Service | | |
|  The Nature Conservancy | | |

Screenshot





Source:
 Census County GIS: Wildlife, land ownership, deer ranges
 Conservation Commission of San Joaquin County
 (September 2012). Based on ODFW data.
 BLM: Oregon Coastal Sage-Grouse RMP Amendment
 Final EIS (May 28, 2013)
 ODFW Elk Flight Data 2017

Proposed Aspen Valley Ranch Bule Tract
 Conservation Easement boundary
 Aspen Valley Ranch tracts

Elk Flight Date, 2010-2017
 Total # of Elk
 • 1 - 15
 • 16 - 42

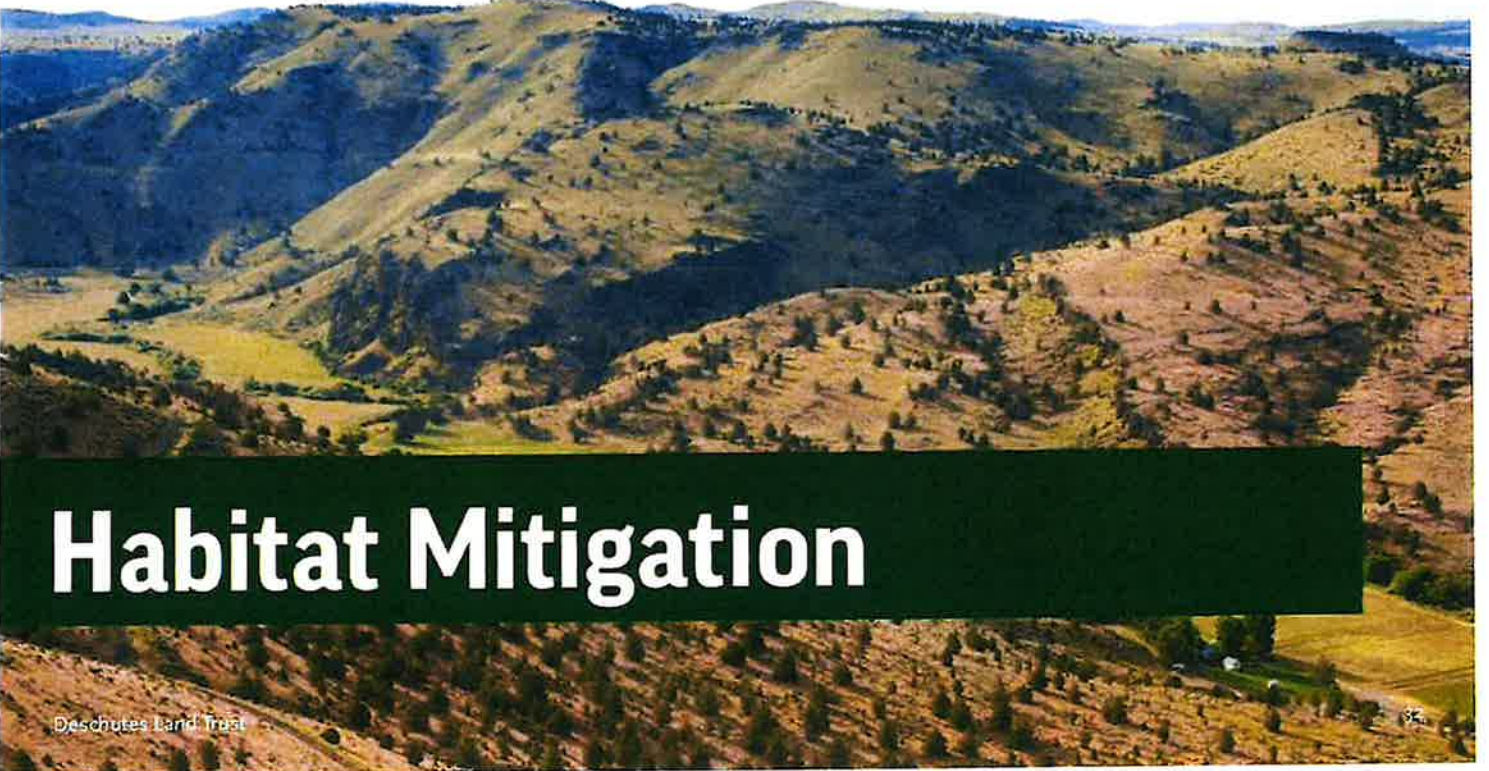
• 43 - 100
 • 101 - 219
 • 219 - 400

Deer Ranges
 Critical Winter Range
 Winter Range

Sage Grouse Habitat (BLM 2015)
 Redband Trout Distribution (ODFW)
 Road
 City



Map by D. Overton, 07/29/12
 11177_AVR_aspenvalley_wildlife.mxd



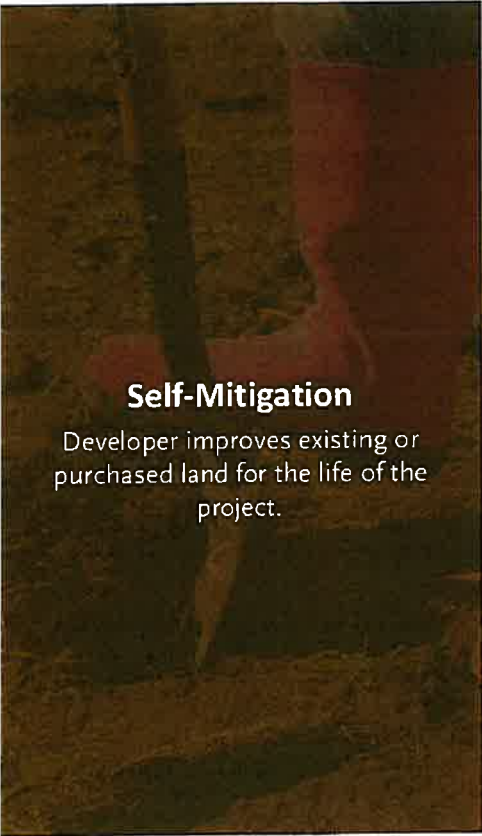
Habitat Mitigation

Deschutes Land Trust

What is the Fish and Wildlife Habitat Mitigation Policy?

The Fish and Wildlife Habitat Mitigation Policy (Policy) provides guidance to ODFW in evaluating the potential impact of land and water development actions on fish and wildlife habitat. Depending on the life history needs for a particular species and the habitat condition or set of conditions that support those needs, a proposed development action may have an adverse effect on fish and wildlife habitat. The Policy sets guidelines to avoid, minimize or mitigate the impact from a development action on fish and wildlife habitat





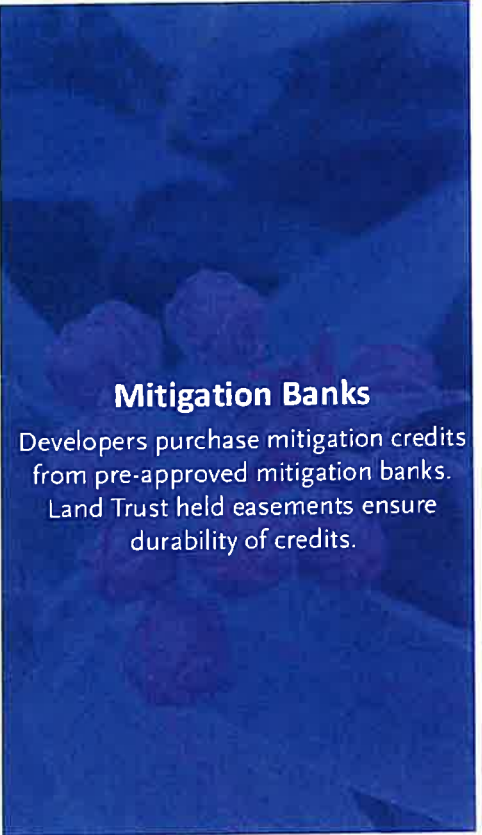
Self-Mitigation

Developer improves existing or purchased land for the life of the project.



Payment in Lieu

Developer works with NGO (usually Land Trust or SWCD) to identify and fund existing or potential conservation and habitat restoration projects that meet mitigation requirement.



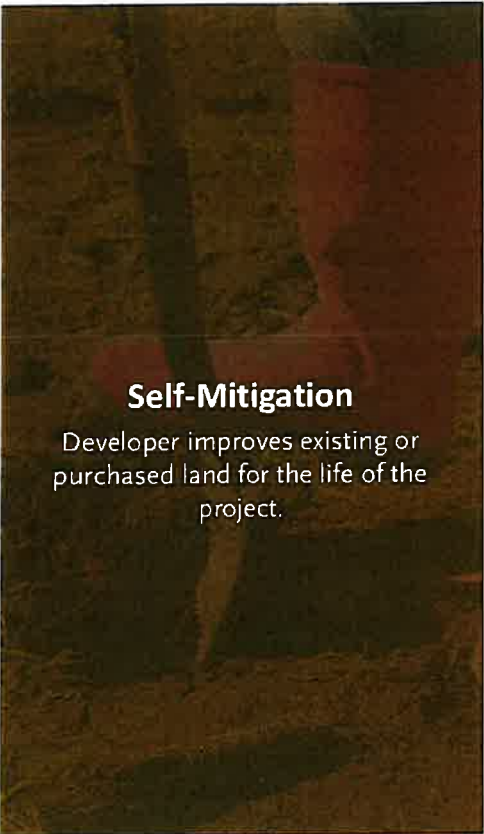
Mitigation Banks

Developers purchase mitigation credits from pre-approved mitigation banks. Land Trust held easements ensure durability of credits.

Priday Ranch

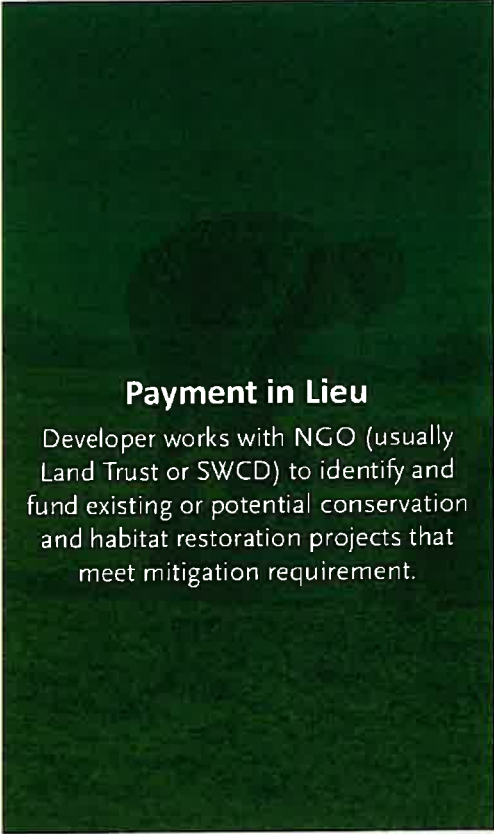
- 1,694 acres
- 40-year obligation
- Maintain and enhance habitat
- Annual monitoring and reporting
- Mitigation Fund = (Impacted acres * M) * (R + L + V + S)
 - M = mitigation ratio
 - R = restoration costs per acre
 - L = restoration maintenance costs per acre
 - V = land value
 - S = stewardship fund costs per acre





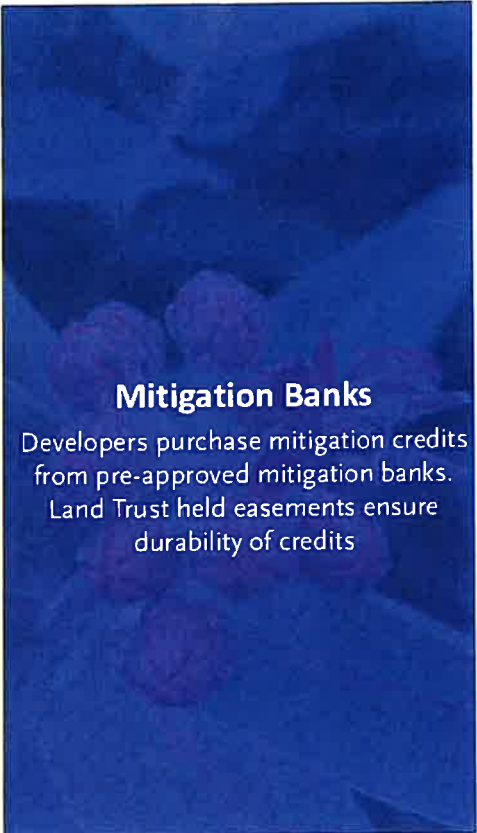
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Keystone Ranch
Crook County, OR



Source: Crook County, TerraWest



- Keystone Boundary (10,309 acres)
- Easement Exclusion Areas
- Federal Lands
- Creeks
- Roads
- Tax Lots

What Does This Mean for Communities:



Opportunities for landowners to monetize conservation efforts while keeping working lands working.



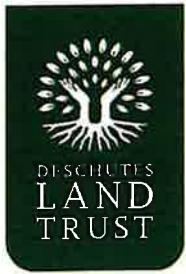
Ensures renewable energy and economic development goals are not undermining fish and wildlife conservation goals



Simplified process for counties to ensure projects are effectively mitigated



Questions?



Thank You!

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