

Minutes

Crook County Natural Resources Committee

August 12, 2026

Committee Members Present: Bill McCormack, Lynne Breese, Calista Songstad, Tim Deboodt, Melinda Kestler, Mike Lunn, Laura York, Steve McGuire, Kim Vogel,

Members Absent: Andy Gallagher, Cliff Kiser, Frank Profily

Guests Present: Jeff Marzal (FS), Greg Jackle (ODFW), Stacey Long (FS), Micah Kiesow (FS), Sam Pearcy (FS)

Public Present: Gayle Hunt, John Breese, Randy Shoaff, Terry Shoaff, Hunter Keuharth, Chuck McGrath, Cate McGrath

Meeting was called to order @ 1:00 p.m. by Chair Steve McGuire

Pledge of Allegiance

Minutes: Lynne moved to revise the June 10, 2026, minutes to reflect individual votes for all actions taken during the meeting. Mike seconded. Bill, Lynne, Calista, Melinda, Mike, Laura, Steve and Kim all voted yes, no nays, motion passed unanimously.

Bill moved to approve the minutes of the July 8, 2026, meeting. Lynne Seconded. Bill, Lynne, Calista, Melinda, Mike, Steve and Kim all voted yes. No nays, Motion passed unanimously.

Agency updates:

Jeff Marzal, Ochoco National Forest Supervisor introduced Sam Pearcy for an update on fire activity on the national forest. Sam reviewed fire activity in the area since the start on July 15, 2026. On that day, a large thunderstorm moved through the region, with lightning strikes starting over 100 fires. On the National Forest, all those were caught and extinguished. Fires started off forest grew in acreage over the next few days, ultimately reaching and burning on the national forest. To date, over 330,000 acres have burned since July 15.

Sam spoke specifically to the Rowe Creek Complex (originally at least 4 separate fires that came together). The current area of concern was along Hwy 26 from Ochoco Creek to the Ranger Station along with the Mill Creek drainage. Working with ODOT, the hope is that Hwy 26 will be open tomorrow (August 13).

Jeff shared that this year's fires mark the most consequential fire season on the Ochoco National Forest as well as Crook County. All agencies are doing all that is possible given limited resources (fires burning through out central and eastern Oregon, the pacific northwest and the western states.

Jeff reported that once fires “are out” the work will continue with fire assessments and restoration planning. Jeff reported that due to the fires, most of the roads on the National Forest are now closed. Closures will remain in effect until further notice.

Micah Kiesow, acting natural resource staff officer for the Ochoco National Forest shared the process for immediate impact analysis and planning is already underway for the Coyote fire and once that BARE report is complete, the team will move to the area impacted by the Shingle fire. Once the Rowe Creek Complex is over, the impact analysis and planning process will begin there as well.

Analysis and planning processes will include life, safety and infrastructure issues, an evaluation of timber harvest/salvage needs and other infrastructure issues including allotment fencing and impacts on water developments.

Within the planned project areas (Trout Creek/Bridge Creek watersheds and North Slope) fire has been active. Significant changes will be made to the planning of these project areas. For example, within the Trout Creek planning area, the Rowe Creek fire has impacted 80 – 90 percent of the planning area. The plan originally was targeting approximately 10,000 acres of commercial treatments, now the estimate is approximately 1800 acres.

The question was asked of the FS as to the timeline for evaluation and planning and implementation of restoration activities. Micah responded that for initial planning for safety and infrastructure concerns, the report will be completed within a couple of weeks. The evaluation and planning for timber and salvage will take weeks to a few months. Implementation will be dependent on being able to obtain funding to carry out the projects identified within the plans.

Kim asked about whether virtual fencing will be an option reviewed by the FS. Jeff responded that that option is being discussed. Micah shared that the need for Allotment Boundary fences was still necessary. Lynne asked about the opportunity for the FS to utilize local media to share basic information about impacts, and FS actions. Jeff and Stacy (Public Information Officer for the Ochoco NF) shared that they are already creating a story board to create a flow of information to the public.

Mike asked about the impacts of smoke on the fire fighting crews and fire camps. Jeff reported that there have been some reported medical concerns (headaches) and that camps have sleeper trailers within the camps, providing personnel with a place of filtered air. There have been no impacts in relation to operations of the actual fire fight.

Chuck McGrath (public) asked about the fire fighting strategy and the complexity it must incur.

Steve McGuire reminded the group that all current fires started on private, state or BLM managed lands and not on the forest. He shared that there just aren't the resources on the private and state side and the reliance of federal assistance in regard to personnel and equipment. Steve shared that the private sector (landowners) needs to assess individual risks and take responsibility for doing all they can in regard to preparation and prevention.

John Breese (public) asked if anyone was including private lands within the burned areas for fire intensity, impacts on the landscapes and recommending mitigation/restoration steps. Jeff responded

that he does not know of any. Micah said that FS personnel were evaluating FS administered lands and BLM was doing the same on lands administered by BLM.

BLM update - no one present

Oregon State Parks – no one present

Greg Jackle shared an update for ODF&W. He talked about the possible impacts of the fires on this year's hunting season. Impacts will be controlled by the areas under federal or state closures, generally, ODF&W does not close hunting seasons but if significant areas of the hunt units are closed, ODFW will adjust, close hunting and allow for refunds and reinstatement of points. Decision notices will be made 1 week prior to the start of each season. Greg encouraged all hunters to make sure emails are up to date within the ODFW website. Email is how the Department will communicate with hunters.

Greg shared that due to the Rowe Creek Fire, the Painted Hills Deer area is likely to be closed and refunds issues just to the extent of the area covered by that fire. He did share that collared wildlife (wolves) have been hanging around within the fire area.

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Mike asked how the new, National Wildland Fire Service was doing? Jeff shared that because the Forest Service is under the Department of Agriculture and not the Department of Interior, they are not a part of this new organization. He did share that within the Central Oregon Fire Service area, the fire staff is all still here.

Melinda asked Jeff why the Ochoco had conducted 2 separate tours of the Trout Creek planning area. Industry and environmental groups? Jeff said the intent was to give each group the space to share thoughts and concerns. Kim reported that the tour she participated in was heavily facilitated. Melinda shared that these groups are all highly informed and that without hearing all perspectives, it is difficult to understand all the concerns. Melinda hoped that in the future, tours include both groups together.

Lynne shared that during the Crook County Fair, the fire groups had excellent booths for the sharing and inaction with the public.

Public Comment:

None

Lynne moved to adjourn the meeting. Mike seconded. Bill, Lynne, Calista, Melinda, Mike, Laura, Steve and Kim all voted yes, no nays, motion passed unanimously.

Meegting was adjourned at 1:47 p.m.

DRAFT