

Notes

John Day-Snake and Southeast Oregon Resource Advisory Councils Joint Meeting Thursday, October 20, 2022

8 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. in-person and via Zoom

Malheur National Forest – 431 Patterson Bridge Rd., John Day, Ore. 97845

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

Southeast Oregon RAC: Ken Poole, Michael O' Casey, Timothy Davis, Mary Jo Hedrick, Stan Shepardson, Philip Milburn, Thomas Batty

Agency Representatives: Wayne Monger, Designated Federal Official /Vale BLM; Baker Field Manager Joe Aragon, Vale BLM; District Manager Todd Forbes, Lakeview BLM; District Manager Jeff Rose, Burns BLM; Alex Enna, Deschutes NF (virtual); Joshua Giles, Malheur NF

Agency Staff: PAO/RAC Coordinator Kaitlyn Webb, Prineville BLM

Presenters: Caryn Burri, Vale BLM; Dustin Webster-Wharton (virtual), OR/WA BLM; Peter Donovan, Managing Wholes; James Archuleta, Region 6 USFS; Matt Krumenauer, USE; Tom Miles, TR Miles

Public: Jessica Keys, representative with Senator Merkley's office; Don Hodge, public/Malheur County Commissioner; Terry Drever Gee, public; Carol Loughlin, public; Eva Harris, public; Shannon Davis, Eastern Region DEQ Coordinator (virtual); Elizabeth Schultz, public; Vanessa Rose, DEQ

Presentation – Boardman to Hemingway (B2H) Transmission Line: Caryn Burri provided an update on the Boardman to Hemingway Transmission Line, see attached presentation. B2H is a proposed 500-kilovolt transmission line that will run approximately 290 miles across eastern Oregon and southwestern Idaho. It connects the proposed Longhorn Substation east of Boardman, Oregon to Idaho Power's existing Hemingway Substation in Owyhee County, Idaho. Property ownership is 30% federal and 90% private, no Tribal lands are crossed.

The purpose is to provide a transmission corridor for some of the new renewable energy sources being produced.

The final Environmental Impact Statement was released November 2016; the Record of Decision was issued November 2017; the Right of Way (ROW) Grant was issued January 2018; the USFS ROW Easement was issued May 2019; the Geotechnical Investigation Determination of NEPA Adequacy was issued July 2019; the U.S. District Court concluded the BLM-approved ROW permit across public lands; and in September 2022 the Energy Facility Siting Council approved the B2H site applications.

Peter asked the purpose of the transmission line. Shay explained that it will be a two-way transmission line to transport power.

Glenn asked what percentage of the cost will come from public versus stakeholders. Most of the financial aspects are managed by the power company, Caryn will ask for more details.

Michael asked how much of the voltage is taken up already, Caryn thinks all of it is already spoken for.

Stan asked what mitigation and rehabilitation will occur. Caryn explained it depends on the land ownership; efforts will occur.

Greg asked about a mitigation site for big game, Caryn said they will piecemeal it, depending on the impacts. Federal agencies only have a say on 30% of the lands.

Presentation – Renewable Energy on Public Lands: Dustin Webster-Wharton provided an overview of renewable energy on public lands, see attached presentation. The Administration's goal is a carbon pollution free power sector by 2035. Congress has also directed the agency to permit 25 gigawatts of solar, wind, and geothermal energy production on public lands by 2025 (25 gigawatts = 18,750,000 homes). Oregon's Renewable Portfolio Standard requires that 50% of the electricity Oregonians use come from renewable sources by 2040. He provided an overview of current projects BLM wide and in Oregon specifically. He also provided an overview of the application process.

Glenn asked if areas near Redmond, OR with significant houseless issues could be prioritized, and if some of the proceeds could go towards fixing the issue. Dustin responded that it is unclear how the homeless issue would weigh into prioritization.

Michael encouraged the state office to focus on public involvement early on, especially when it comes to migration corridors.

Greg recommended that the state office sit down with applicants and work with them to get the counties onboard ahead of time. He noted there should be parallel state and federal policies. The BLM will benefit from working with local entities as soon as possible.

Jerry asked if any funding would come back to the local area or Prineville District, this is unclear.

Terry asked how pre-existing permits will be handled. Dustin explained that it will depend on which field office and district it will be one, local staff will work with the applicants on that aspect.

Presentation – Climate Change: Peter Donovan presented on climate change. He noted that the climate crisis has increased people's interest in energy. Photosynthesis is the largest energy consumer; half of which occurs in the ocean. Photosynthesis has tremendous leverage on water cycling.

Peter used flour and water for a soil aggregation demonstration to simulate rain on dry, unaggregated soil versus aggregated soil with microbiology in it. The flour – representing dry, unaggregated soil – eroded, there was no moisture penetration, and it was still susceptible to wind. He used bread to represent aggregated soil with microbiology in it. When water was applied, there was still land stability, no sediment run off, and it absorbed/held moisture. Water runs off of compacted soil very easily.

Soil health principals include cover (living or dead plant material, protects soil from rain drops and insulates the soil), living roots (feed the soil), diversity (different plants feed different microbes), minimized tillage (destroys soil aggregation), integrate livestock or animals. Aggregated soil will dissolve in water completely. Peter noted the connection between carbon cycling and water cycling.

Peter used a pendulum to demonstrate the relationship between water and carbon cycles. The water cycle is smaller but has a significant impact on the carbon cycle. This relationship is not linear or predictable. Water vapor is the biggest trapper of greenhouse gases, water vapor is increasing in the atmosphere. As a result, we are having more intense flooding and longer droughts. This has much to do with soil compaction, we don't have as much aggregated soil. The interplay between the water cycle and the carbon cycle can't be predicted or modeled.

Presentation – Management Strategies and Plans in Redistributing Organic Matter with Biochar from Forested Watersheds: James Archuleta presented about management strategies and benefits of redistributing biochar on the landscape, see attached presentation. Highlights included the landscape problem, biomass load leads to elevated wildfire risk, natural charcoal deposition, comparison examples of plants grown with biochar versus without (seed growth increase with biochar), best soil conditions for biochar use with the least risk, conditions, or locations to avoid biochar use and why, and future management opportunities.

Best places to put biochar include dry/young soils, volcanic soils, and overstocked forests. Applied biochar to fine dust soil increases water holding capacity, adds nutrients, adds nutrient holding capacity, reduces run off, increases water absorption, and improves drought resilience.

Presentation – Technologies to Produce Biochar: Tom Miles presented about biochar market and technologies, see attached presentation. Highlights included applications, feedstocks, and technologies including combustion, pyrolysis, and gasification; the different forms and qualities of biochar for different uses; an explanation of the process for making biochar; how physical, chemical, biological, and electrochemical properties improve soil health and the environment; an overview of biochar production systems; and the variety of biochar markets available.

Presentation – Biochar: A Win-Win for Agriculture, Forestry, and the Environment (virtual): A prerecorded presentation by Dr. Stephen Machado was shared about how biochar benefits agriculture, forestry, and the environment, see attached presentation. Highlights included what biochar is, biochar benefits to soil, overviews of biochar soil studies, and how biochar can offset climate change,

Presentation – Restoration Fuels: Developing Markets to Advance Forest Restoration and Resiliency: Matt Krumenauer provided a safety briefing and project overview of the Restorations Fuels, LLC which is a commercial scale demonstration and development facility producing torrefied wood and biochar, see attached presentation.

At the facility, biomass will be sourced from nearby National Forest restoration treatments, mill residuals, and private lands. The plan will begin offering commercial tests and off-take agreements beginning in 2023. The goal originally was to develop a market for small-diameter, low-value biomass that can help support the economics of forest health restoration and reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire. A timeline of progress from 2015 to present was shared. Matt also shared a safety presentation for the site tour.

Notes
John Day-Snake Resource Advisory Council Meeting
Friday, October 21, 2022
8 a.m. – 1 p.m. in-person and via Zoom
Malheur National Forest – 431 Patterson Bridge Rd., John Day, Ore. 97845

Attendance:

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

Agency Reps: Wayne Monger, Designated Federal Official/Vale BLM; Lisa Clark, Prineville BLM; Joe Aragon, Vale BLM; Anthony Botello, Wallowa-Whitman NF; Joshua Giles, Malheur NF; Richard Vacirca, Ochoco NF; Cassidy Kern, Ochoco NF; Alex Enna, Deschutes NF

Agency support: Kaitlyn Webb, Prineville BLM PAO/RAC Coordinator

Public: Terry Drever Gee, public; Mark Webb, BMFP; Trent Middlebrooks, Prairie Wood Products

Remembrance for Art Waugh: Randy led a moment of silence and remembrance for Art Waugh.

Minutes: February 2022 meeting minutes were approved with no changes.

Set 2023 Meeting Dates: The Council will meet in Prineville on February 22-23, in La Grande or Baker on June 22-23 and in Maupin on October 19-20.

Agency Updates:

Vale BLM – Joe Aragon provided Vale District updates, see attached briefing. Highlights included updates on the Boardman to Hemingway Powerline Project, National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center, volunteer events, the Baker Resource Management Plan Evaluation, a busy recreation season, key maintenance projects, weed treatment project accomplishments, and the 2022 wildfire season.

Prineville BLM – Lisa Clark provided Prineville District updates, see attached briefing. Highlights included updates on the Sunflower Creek culvert replacement project, Lower John Day Basin Land Acquisition Draft EA, updates to the John Day Boater Guidebook, John Day Boater Season, La Pine Basin Project, Solar Projects, resort development, Redmond Sewage Treatment Plan Project, Lower Deschutes toilet replacement and removal project, 2022 wildfire season success, and fuels program successes and plans for 2023.

Mary mentioned there is a public comment meeting in Bend on Monday for Thornburgh Resort.

Mia suggested that campground surveys and inventories for the John Day River be done at the end of the peak season so it's obvious where people are going and not too early in the season when sites might appear overgrown. She also asked that the BLM prioritize getting public input for the new guidebook - invite the guides and public to comment/provide input to the new boater guide. She noted, based on the number of campgrounds in the 1st ten miles out of 30-mile, that there should be five launches a day instead of four.

Glenn initiated a discussion about competitive bids for solar given the large number of applicants and overlapping interest areas. Members discussed how a competitive announcement would allow communities to weigh in on which would offer the greatest benefit.

Brian noted there is an upcoming outfitter and guide meeting to discuss commercial use on the John Day River in November.

Randy initiated a discussion about staffing, BLM and Forest Service agencies discussed the high number of vacancies they are experiencing and current hiring challenges.

Deschutes NF – Alex Enna provided Deschutes National Forest updates, see attached briefing. Highlights included updates on the Cascades Wilderness Permit implementation, Forest Service Wildfire Crisis Funding, Green Ridge Landscape Restoration Project, Cabin Butte Vegetation Project, Wyeth Boat Ram, and the Deschutes-Ochoco Resource Advisory Committee.

Glenn commended the forest on their use of Wildfire Crisis Funding in populated areas. He inquired whether mitigation work could be done to prevent wildfires from coming out of the wilderness so easily.

Umatilla NF – No representative was present for the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest, see attached briefing for updates.

Ochoco NF – Cassidy Kern provided Ochoco National Forest updates, see attached briefing. Highlights included updates on the prescribed burning program, Forest Service Road 42 paving project, Forest-wide cattleguard reconstruction and replacement project, Lamonta compound, Forest Service Road 22 reconstruction project, Ochoco Wild Horse Herd Management Plan, Mill Creek Vegetation Management Project, North Fork Crooked River Vegetation Management project, Ochoco Trails Group Non-Motorized Trails proposal, Bellwether Healthy Forest Restoration, Black Mountain Vegetation Management project, Current logging and log hauling activity, and a regional planning update.

Mary expressed her approval of the Forest Service Road 42 paving project.

Wallowa-Whitman NF – Anthony Botello provided Wallowa-Whitman National Forest updates, see attached briefing. Highlights included updates on the Baker City Watershed project, recreation for the 2022 season, Morgan Nesbit restoration project, Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) funding, roads and engineering accomplishments, fuels treatment accomplishments, timber sales, and the 2022 wildfire season.

Glenn commented on the varying water flows and levels in Hells Canyon and noted the harm to fish. He asked who is responsible for the water regulation there. Shay provided some context on a meeting that occurred earlier this week addressing these concerns.

Malheur NF: Joshua Giles provided Malheur National Forest updates, see attached briefing. Highlights included updates on the Austin Vegetation Project, Bark Vegetation Project, Cliff Knox Vegetation Project, Murderers Creek Wild Horse Joint Management Area and Herd Management Area Plan, Emigrant Creek Ranger District Aspen EA, timber offerings, and multi-forest projects.

Randy asked about concession contracts. Anthony explained that concessions are a public private partnership, and the forest doesn't get involved.

Randy also mentioned he has received a lot of feedback regarding the conditions of restrooms and campgrounds.

Jim asked how the federal government increases pay at an agency level. Anthony explained is difficult, but not impossible. It cannot be addressed locally unfortunately.

Tim suggested a subcommittee to discuss and formulate creative ideas regarding how to address federal pay, housing, and HR challenges.

Presentation: Blue Mountain Forest Plan / Blues Intergovernmental Council – Anthony Botello gave an update on the Blue Mountain Forest Plan and provided an overview of the Blues Intergovernmental Council (BIC).

The Blue Mountain Forest Plan is a collective forest plan revision process for the Wallowa-Whitman, Umatilla, and Malheur national forests. There was a final EIS in 2018, however in the spring of 2019 the decision was made to pause and put the revisions on hold. There was significant public engagement in 2018/2019, the primary points of controversy were access (where/how it would be provided), grazing, and wildlife security. After the plan was withdrawn, the idea of an intergovernmental council was brought forward. It would allow the forests to engage with other government agencies in ways they couldn't with the general public.

The BIC was formed in 2019 and consists of government leaders from counties, states, federal and Tribal entities surrounding the Blue Mountains. The diverse membership of the BIC ensures numerous perspectives and interests are represented in discussions around forest management issues. The BIC has worked with the Forest Service over the past two years on key issues from the withdrawn Forest Plans. Through these discussions, the BIC provided recommendations on several forest management issues, including riparian livestock grazing, fisheries, hydrology, forest health, and access. The BIC also commissioned and oversaw the completion of a socioeconomic analysis that identifies potential community impacts from forest management decisions. These discussions and products offer important context from diverse perspectives to serve as a baseline for an improved Forest Plan revision process moving forward. See attached BIC presentation (shared at another meeting) provided by Anthony for more details.

The BIC will host a series of public engagement sessions this fall to involve the public in the Forest Plan Revision Process. The public is invited to attend and learn about the BIC's purpose, hear updates on the BIC's work products, hear updates on the Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision process, and ask questions or share concerns. Anthony noted that this is not a Forest Service led or hosted meeting. The public will have opportunities to provide feedback directly to the Forest Service during the Forest Plan Revision process through various public engagements and specified formal comment periods once plan revision is initiated.

The forests are hiring a team of 12 Forest Service specialists to take on the planning effort moving forward. Six will be scattered across the Blue Mountains and six can work remotely. Anthony noted that the 2012 planning rule allows the forest supervisors to be the decision makers in the planning process, whereas decisions were made at the regional level previously.

Presentation: Prairie Wood Products – Trent Middlebrooks presented a history and overview of the Prairie Wood Products plant. The plant was out of commission for 13 years, it required six months of testing to get up and running again, technology had advanced significantly. Co-gen was established to provide energy for the plant using biomass found in surrounding forests. Staffing and hiring continue to be challenges for the plant. The recent decline in number of homes being built is another primary challenge. Prairie Wood Products is having a positive impact on the local market, Trent noted several indicators of growth locally. They are working to establish the right contracts and increase the plant's efficiency to keep up with economic impacts, one example is the cost of lumber is down 60%. As long as the plant can maintain a stable workforce and establish steady supply, they can employ 50 more people from local and outlying areas at a living wage.

Glenn asked about primary sources, Trent explained Malheur NF is their primary source.

Tom asked about preparations in case of an economic downturn. Trent responded that production costs need to be driven down as low as possible. There are some adjustments that can be made, but it all depends on efficiency of the mill.

Mark asked if the Malheur National Forest can support two mills. Trent said it varies some, but generally, yes.

Greg asked about diameter max the mill can process, Trent responded there is a 28-inch stump limit

Glenn asked if the mill processes White Fir in addition to Douglas Fir, yes.

Round table:

Greg – noted that the mule deer management plan is being rewritten, might be a good future presentation. Working with solar developers to offset their wildlife impacts. Wasting disease was detected last year in Idaho, in response testing has been ramped up in Oregon.

Randy – suggested an update on the 30-mile recreation plan might be a good topic for the meeting in Prineville. Cabin Lake Guard Station – can it be preserved – if so, how? Wrote several letters to Secretary Haaland regarding RAC reappointments. Encouraged recruitment for the RAC. Noted an interest in future discussions about water right permits not being issued when there isn't water available, more discussions around this hopefully this fall.

Tom – mentioned a section of the Crooked River was evaluated by a BLM-led instream flow group, most diverse and interesting section. Senses lack of capacity from BLM – funding and staffing related. Crooked River board members are frustrated with the BLM's lack of capacity. Outdoor/recreation use levels increased significantly across the nation, important to discuss. Increasing recreational activity, decreasing agency staffing.

Jim – noted the water situation in Sisters versus Madras, highlighted that Oregon is one of the few places where water isn't regulated, first come serve, good future discussion. Mentioned success of a Rogue River Guidebook, specifically referring to campsites, might be a great future discussion topic and reference for the group look at – potential for developing something similar on Deschutes or Crooked River.

Shay – noted lots of user issues in Hells Canyon, public accessing the area without proper permits. Mentioned a recent ranger incident – member of the public attempted to enter without a permit, proceeded to almost hit ranger on duty with vehicle, and came to the area again without a permit. Trend of new and uninformed users, not following rules. Posed the question of how the RAC can help the agencies regulate and enforce permits, rules, and regulations. Lots of trail work completed recently in Hells Canyon. Idaho Parks and Rec developed an edict video based off of Forest Service edict. Cash creek docks are ready to be installed.

Brian – noted that the Anti-poaching Reward Program expanded to include illegal outfitting and guiding, increased fees dedicated to these activities. The Outfitters and Guides Committee is managing those funds.

Glenn – on the recruitment note, it is hard to get someone excited about being a part of the council just sitting in the meeting, can members of the public/potential new members join the group dinner? Consensus was yes.

Mary – appreciative of the field trip. Looking forward to discussing water issues. Noted her interest in keeping e-bikes on the radar and the increases in recreation over the past few years.

Susie – questioned whether the RAC could approach congress to address the agency wage challenges. Highlighted the importance for public education and LE funding to address new user challenges. Very interested in perusing funding for fair wages with federal agencies.

Mia – expressed concern over the steelhead fishing closure on the John Day for a second year, noted impacts local communities and commercial outfitters and guides. Requested that the inability to run steelhead trips be considered when measuring historical use. Noted she felt it was difficult to get permits for public and commercial outfitters and guides again this year on the John Day River. Would love to hear more about big horn sheep, numbers declining.

Katy – mentioned wolves and the North Fork Paiutes – for insidious society, hunting is their livelihood, wolves are deadly.

Jerry – solar is very important, it has been mandated by states and federal government. It will be important to find a way to get ahead of it. Crook County and Prineville are working on a big biomass facility, might be a potential tour for the February meeting. Water, solar, and biomass should be priorities.

JDS RAC Subcommittees – Randy reviewed standing subcommittees and their membership including Blue Mountain Forest Plan (Randy, Jim, and Katy); Fire, Fuels, and Biomass (Jerry, Katy, and Jim); Hells Canyon (Glenn, Randy, Brian, and Shay); Mineral Resources (Randy and Susie); and Outdoor Recreation (Randy and Shay). Three new subcommittees were proposed including Renewable Energy, Waterway Recreation, and Agency Staffing and Recruitment.

Kaitlyn will update the committee list and send it out with the meeting minutes. The list will be brought forward again at the next meeting in February. Committee members who are interested in joining a subcommittee can voice that at the February meeting.

Randy gave a brief overview of how subcommittees operate.

Wrap-up:

Future Agenda Items:

- Thirtymile Recreation Plan
- Bighorn sheep in OR
- Water rights/availably
- Crooked River section near Crooked River Ranch – how is it being managed?
- Rouge River campground guide – ideas to apply here
- River permit enforcement – how can the RAC help
- Crook County biomass plant
- Deer and elk population management
- Subcommittees review
- Increase in Rec
- E-Bikes
- John Day River commercial use/permitting
- John Day River guide
- Mule deer near
- Solar
- Deschutes/Ochoco RAC update
- Hells Canyon water levels/regulation relicensing
- Salmon reintroduction to Wallowa Lake

Public Comment Period:

Terry – is going to reapply for the RAC. Provided some history and an overview of the RAC over the years. The involvement of the Forest Service makes this RAC very diverse and successful. The more the diversity, the better the decisions. Noticed creativity during this meeting.

Mark – commented on the increasing elk and decreasing deed populations in most places. ODFW appears to have a siloed approach to management of each – would be great to hear how efforts are being integrated. In regard to the Blues Forest Plan – suggested ODFW and Forest Service have a public conversation about how they intent to work together and meet objectives at a landscape scale. Would be nice if there was sense for wolf impacts to deer vs. elk, transparency from ODFW on this would help people understand the complexity of the situation.