

Local

County Commissioners urge USFS timber salvage

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On Wednesday, Baker County Commission Chair Bill Harvey, Commissioners Mark Bennett and Tim Kerns, and Executive Assistant Heidi Martin were joined by Wallowa-Whitman National Forest Supervisor Tom Montoya and Whitman District Ranger Jeff Tomac for a second U.S. Forest Service coordination meeting, held at the County Courthouse.

Attendance also included Baker Natural Resource Advisory Committee (NRAC) Coordinator Eric Wuntz, Ed Hardt, Cynthia Long, Jan Alexander, Wanda and Tork Ballard, Bobbie Danser, Chuck Chase, and Alice Knapp.

The 2 1/2 hour meeting included heavy emphasis from Harvey many times on the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) declaring an emergency, and allowing as much salvage/danger timber to be removed from areas affected by wildfires as possible.

“Have you requested the declaration?” Harvey asked Tomac, to which he responded, “No. We’re still looking at the data, on whether or not it’s viable to go after larger than a 250-acre, or a couple of 250-acre CEs (Categorical Exclusions) for Windy-Cornet (Cornet-Windy Ridge wildfire area), because, it’s not viable right now for the other three fires (El Dorado, Eagle Complex and Dry Gulch).”

Tomac had provided the Board with maps indicating 82 miles of County roads, around which personnel are currently marking 46 miles of them for danger tree removal.

He said there was a discussion between the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT), the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF), and the USFS, about which trees to remove.

“My concern is, looking at your map, I don’t see any potential (timber) sales or anything, so, I have no idea what you’re looking at,” Harvey said, to Tomac.

Tomac explained that he didn’t realize the map wasn’t clear enough, and he pointed out color-coded areas with potential salvage timber.

“It’s not a lot—about 1,000 acres,” of 29,000 burned acres, on Dooley Mountain, Tomac said. Tomac explained to the Board that the board-foot estimate is about 4,000 to 5,000 per acre, or 1,000,000 to 1,250,000, for



At far left, Tom Montoya and Jeff Tomac of the USFS meet with Baker County Commissioners Bennett, Harvey, and Kerns.

a 250-acre area.

“The 250 acres we’ve identified for Baker is stuff that’s valuable—logs that are of value—and, it’s in areas that the industry would look at going in there and taking it out,” Tomac said.

Harvey noted that, according to the map provided, most of the identified acreage is on the north side of Dooley Mountain, and close to roads, but, he said, “I see, on most of the fire, there’s little to no attempt to salvage logs, at this juncture... We have 48,000 acres (lands managed by the USFS) of fire, and we’re only getting 250 acres out of it?”

Tomac pointed out again the 46 miles of marked County roads for danger tree removal, and the estimate of 6,000,000 board feet from that process, with possibly one or two 250-acre CEs additionally.

“Do we have any idea how much burnt timber is out there?” Harvey asked Tomac.

Tomac responded that of the 29,000 acres burned on Dooley, about 1/3 was a high intensity burn, about 1/3 moderate, and about 1/3 low intensity. “I don’t know the exact numbers, but there’s a certain percentage of those trees that are dead or dying,” Tomac said, and the areas would be analyzed to determine what salvage is viable.

“Topography, value, accessibility—the yellow (color-coded areas on the map, 1,000 acres) is what we’re, for right now, coming up with for opportunities,” Tomac said, in response to Bennett’s question about including other larger areas as potentials

for salvage purposes.

There was a discussion between primarily Harvey and Tomac regarding the costs and difficulties versus the need to remove salvage timber, and Harvey said, “The tree is there. It should be removed, because it does have some value. We can’t leave two-thirds of it standing there, just because we don’t want to do more studies, or, we don’t think we’re going to get enough dollars out of it... My point is, it’s standing there, right in front of our face. We need to make every possible attempt to get every single tree that has some market value to the market.”

“The answer to your question is, there is no market value,” Tomac said, explaining the difficulties involved with the timber market, and selling salvaged timber.

Tomac said that there will likely be a 250-acre CE with the Eagle Complex fire, resulting in a board feet estimate of 1,000,000 to 2,000,000.

He also said that there’s not much potential for salvage timber in the El Dorado fire area, and a CE is not likely in the Dry Gulch fire area.

Discussion continued primarily between Harvey, Tomac and Montoya, with Harvey reiterating the need to move the process along, and remove as much salvage timber as possible, and Tomac and Montoya responding with safety and litigation concerns, and that they’re implementing the proper process, and lacking sufficient data to move more swiftly.

Bennett noted that there needs to be a map with

more thorough information, including overlays, and said, “If we had an overlay of, where the timber is at, that’s moderately burned, that would be marketable timber, in relation to these roads...that would be logical.”

Later in the meeting, Harvey said to Tomac, “I’m hoping and assuming correctly that we don’t have to worry about the 21-inch rule, on anything dead or dying, correct?”

Tomac said, “I would say no, we’re not worried about it along the roads,” however, it was unclear whether that would be a concern otherwise.

The 21-inch rule refers to a requirement that trees larger than 21 inches in diameter have to be dead before they’re cut.

Kerns voiced concerns during the meeting, and said, “I can’t understand why you wouldn’t be already applying for a declaration of an emergency, looking at filing an EA (Environmental Analysis), while you’re doing the CE... You should be doing all of the above...”

Bennett said, “We need to be nimble. I mean, really, because, whatever you’re doing, let’s be ready and get moving...”

Harvey stated issues with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process, and said that sometimes, there is favoritism toward environmental factors, and less consideration given to other details.

Tomac responded that he believes there is a balanced approach being implemented, and that he and Harvey could discuss specific examples of Harvey’s concerns in the near future.

John Day, Snake RAC meetings scheduled

The next John Day – Snake and Southeast Oregon Resource Advisory Council (RAC) meetings are set for Monday and Tuesday, October 26 to 27, 2015. The John Day-Snake and Southeast Oregon RACs will hold a joint workshop Monday, October 26, 2015, at the BLM Prineville District office, 3050 N.E. 3rd Street, Prineville, Oregon, followed by separate business meetings Tuesday, October 27, 2015. The Monday, Oct. 26, meeting will run from 12:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. The two RACs will meet separately Tuesday, October 26, from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m., with the John Day- Snake RAC meeting at the BLM Prineville District office, and the Southeast Oregon RAC meeting at the Ochoco National Forest Office, 3160 N.E. 3rd Street, Prineville, Oregon.

Agenda items for the October 26 joint meeting include learning sessions on the 2015 fire season, Wild Horse and Burro management, a Greater Sage-grouse update, a discussion on RACs role in land designations, and community engagement. The John Day-Snake RAC will continue Oct. 27 with an update on the Lower Deschutes River, Hells Canyon and Snake River fee proposals, committee and member updates, and an Oregon proposal for Wild Horse and Burro. The Southeast Oregon RAC will continue Oct. 27 with RAC officer elections, an Oregon proposal for Wild Horse and Burro, and committee and member updates.

The public is welcome to attend all portions of the meeting and can contribute in-person or via phone during the official public comment period at 11 a.m. on October 27, 2015. Those who verbally address the RAC during the open session are asked to also provide a written statement of their comments or presentation.

The Secretary of the Interior appoints citizens to staggered three-year terms on the Council, so one-third of the member terms expire yearly. Every year the BLM encourages Oregon residents to apply, or nominate others to apply for open positions they would like to represent. Membership is balanced to reflect the array of interests and users of public lands with categories in commodity interests, conservation, and general community interests. For further information on the John Day – Snake RAC or the upcoming meeting, contact Lisa Clark at the BLM Prineville District Office at (541) 416-6864 or Larisa Bogardus at the BLM Lakeview District Office at (541) 947-6237 for the Southeast Oregon RAC and upcoming meeting. Additional information about both RACs, as well as the call-in number can be found online at: <http://www.blm.gov/or/rac/index.php>

Wolf delisting meeting ahead

On November 9, 2015, the ODFW Commission will meet in Salem to consider the status of gray wolves under the Oregon Endangered Species Act. Specifically, the Commission will determine if sufficient information exists to justify delisting the wolf from the Oregon List of Endangered Species and in making this determination the Commission will review the best available scientific information and other data to determine if the criteria set forth in the OESA have been met.

In an effort to consult with agencies, organizations, local governments, tribes, other states and interested persons, we invite you to review the October 9, 2015 updated biological status review document by going to the ODFW web site.

Comments and materials can be submitted from the public by October 30, 2015 to: Russ Morgan, Wolf Program Coordinator, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, 107 20th Street, La Grande, OR 97850.

Grande Ronde Symphony to hold concert

The 2015-2016 Chamber Concert series, sponsored by the Grande Ronde Symphony Association, will kick off Friday, October 23, at 7:30 p.m. This first chamber concert of the season will be held at the home of Lanetta Paul, 60751 Wood Road, in La Grande.

The GRSA is so very pleased to feature our former concertmaster, Lisa Robertson. Lisa will be performing with fellow musical friends James Cook on piano, Lucia Orr on viola, and Edward Dixon on cello. The concert program will include Mozart’s Quartet in G minor, KV 478 and Brahms’s Quartet in C minor, Op. 60.

Season ticket passes (four chamber concerts) may be purchased for \$100 per season pass through the GRSA at P.O. Box 824, La Grande, OR 97850. Single tickets may be purchased at the door for \$25 each. Refreshments, wine, and punch will be offered following the concert, a perfect way to cap a wonderful evening of music.

For further information please contact Patty Sandoz at 541-963-7595 or at psandoz@eou.edu.

New exhibit opens at Oregon Trail Interpretive Center

A new special exhibit at the National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center uses interactive exhibits to help visitors of all ages explore the cultural and natural history found along the Oregon Trail.

The Oregon Trail Discovery Room opens on October 26 and will be on display through January 17, 2016. The exhibit features a shadow puppet

theater with a storyline about the animals found in Snake River Country. Visitors can also discover more about animals that make their home in Oregon’s forests, interact with a map of Oregon’s geographic geography, or try on pioneer era replica clothing. Interactive displays delve into quilting, homesteading, Native Americans and historic trails.

The exhibit is in the Flagstaff Gallery within the Interpretive Center. Live presentations, films, and activities related to the exhibit are scheduled in the Leo Adler Theater.

The National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center, operated by the Bureau of Land Management, is located five miles east of Baker City, Oregon on Highway 86. Take

Exit 302 from I-84. The Center changes to winter hours on October 18 and will be open 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily. Admission for adults is \$8.00; for seniors it’s \$4.50; children 15 and under are admitted for free. Federal passes are accepted. Call (541) 523-1843 for updates on programs and events.

Visit oregontrail.blm.gov for information.