

Local

Forest resiliency meeting draws crowd to armory

BY TODD ARRIOLA
Todd@TheBakerCountyPress.com

Around 30 community members attended the last public engagement session for the Proposed Action for the Blue Mountains Forest Resiliency Project, held at the National Guard Armory in Baker City, on Thursday, March 31, 2016, at 6 p.m.

Representation from the United States Forest Service (USFS) included Forest Supervisor Tom Montoya, District Ranger Jeff Tomac, Public Affairs Officers Darcy Weseman and Katy Gray, and Blue Mountains Restoration Strategy Team Leader Ayn Shlisky, among others.

Local attendance included Bill and Lorrie Harvey, Mike Kee, Gary Timm, Alice Knapp, John and Ramona Creighton, Ed Hardt, Terry Drever Gee, Carmelita Holland, Tim and Jan Kerns, Eric Wuntz, and Kody Justus.

Montoya welcomed the crowd, and explained the purpose of the project, a large-scale effort to restore about 680,000 acres of dry forestland, across three National Forests, the Ochoco, Umatilla, and Wallowa-Whitman, through thinning, and prescribed fire treatments. This is broken down as: 118,000 acres on the Ochoco National Forest; 212,000 acres on the Umatilla National Forest; and 280,000 acres on the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest.

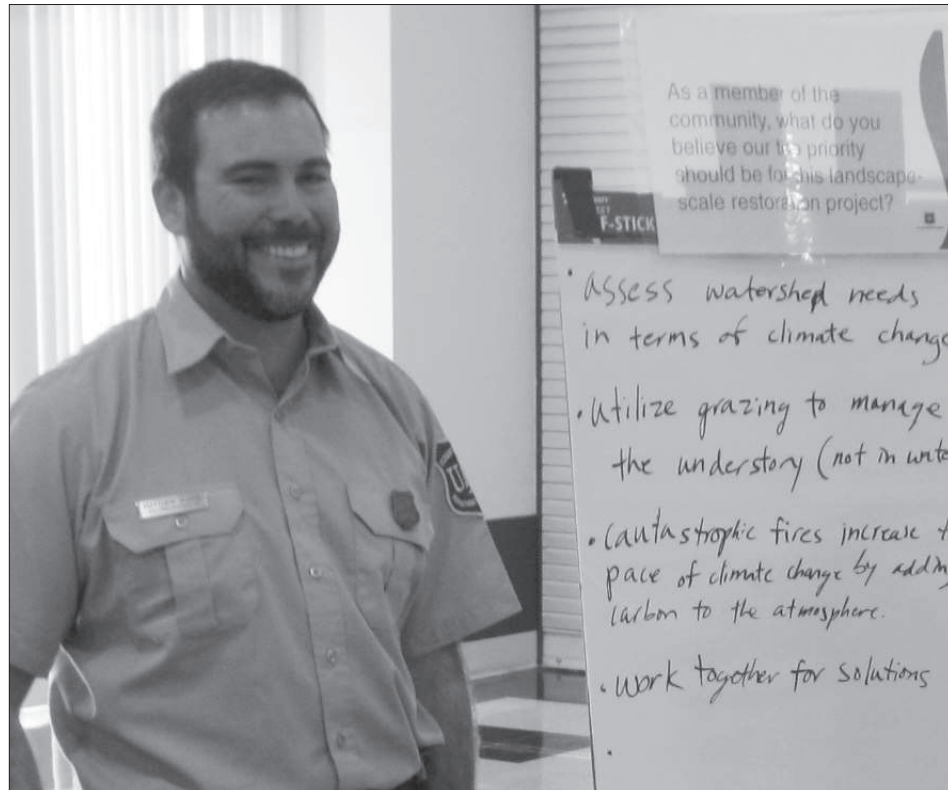
These actions are proposed to reduce the risks of large wildfires, such as during the 2015 season, the worst in U.S. history, and will result in reduced risk of fire spread to adjacent lands, increased jobs, and other benefits, according to the proposal. The 60-day scoping period for the Proposed Action began February 5, 2016, and the USFS accepted comments until April 5, 2016.

Montoya explained the format for the session, which was an informative presentation from Shlisky to begin with (without questions from attendees), followed by individual group discussions, in order to provide comments, at four different commenting stations, with the following topics: Forest Management, Fire, Communities, and Wildlife, Aquatics, and other Sensitive Habitats. Attendees participated in the discussion at each station, rotating periodically throughout the session.

The Forest Management station posed the following question: "A large part of the landscape is overstocked with a combination of small to large diameter trees. What does the landscape need, and what can the Forest Service do to achieve that?"

Some of the answers were: more thinning; exploring biomass; exploring economic opportunities; thinning watersheds on north slopes; protecting watersheds; opening up more firewood areas; and maintaining some ground cover during prescribed fire.

The Fire station posed the following question: "How would you suggest the agency manage the forest landscape to allow



Todd Arriola / The Baker County Press

The WWNF's Matt Burks takes notes from attendees on their views of top priorities.



Todd Arriola / The Baker County Press

The crowd listens to Tom Montoya (center right) speak.

for less destructive wildfire events to occur?"

Some of the answers were: listening to local people and agencies, and using local knowledge for assistance with prescribed fire or wildfire; wildland fire fighting access; staggering burns, to manage forage for deer; established community protection; thinning projects; the priority of the Baker City Watershed; and livestock grazing.

The Communities station posed the following question: "As a member of the community, what do you believe our top priority should be for this landscape-scale restoration project?"

Some of the answers were: starting controlled burns near communities, and working away, ensuring more protection for the communities; using local resources for communication during fires; explaining why not all dry forest areas are treated; grazing to manage the understory; stopping conservationists from appealing; no more roadless areas; and opening slash to wood cutters, and biomass production.

The Wildlife, Aquatics, and other Sensitive Habitats station posed the following question: "What fish and/or wildlife species and habitats are important for us to consider when planning the Forest Resiliency Project activities? What conditions do you

see benefiting these species and their habitats?"

Some of the answers were: clarification of the objection process/litigation; prescribed burning within municipal watersheds; prescribed fire impacts on huckleberries (a common comment with the public sessions); livestock as part of projects, to reduce weeds, and influence big game movement; addressing medusahead/thatch; the proposed action was too general; effects on municipal water supply; effects on irrigation and water rights/supply (short- and long-term impacts); overall watershed health; and grazing, to help reduce fuels.

Attendance for previous public sessions averaged around 20, which included the following locations: Clarkston, Washington, on March 8, Walla Walla, Washington, on March 9, Pendleton, on March 10, and Heppner, on March 15, for the Umatilla National Forest; Prineville, on March 16, for the Ochoco National Forest; Enterprise, on March 29, La Grande, on March 30, and Bake City, on March 31, for the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest.

Once the groups reassembled into the main group, the comments were reviewed for each station, displayed collectively for attendees to see, and it was explained that the comments would become part

of the record, and taken into consideration, as potential solutions, which can be incorporated into the project. The draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) internal review is anticipated to be in April/May 2016, and the publishing of the DEIS, and comment period are anticipated to be in June/July 2016.

Weseman said, "We're getting quite a few comments...There has been overall support for the project—interest in maintaining recreational access, maintaining old roads, etc. More commercial harvests—that's been a big theme, and using local labor, reducing the fire risks—a lot of what we're trying to do ... In general, most people understand the concept of why we're doing this ... Our team (restoration strategy team) is dedicated to this project..."

Gray said, "It's been really interesting, the different focus areas, within the communities. This one was a lot more focused on watershed health, and stream health ... La Grande was more focused on big game species—keeping them on public land, hunting resources, that type of thing ... Huckleberries were consistent, across the board...Grazing came up quite a bit ... Lots of great comments, and good conversations ...Good participation, and substantive feedback ..."

Crossroads gets grants

Crossroads Carnegie Art Center in Baker City is pleased to announce two exciting new grants which have been awarded in the last month.

Crossroads received a \$12,875.00 grant from the Ford Family Foundation Visual Arts Grant Program to make needed improvements to the inside of the main gallery at Crossroads. "This grant is a first step as part of four grant package to make significant improvements to the interior of the Carnegie Library Building," states Executive Director Ginger Savage. "We forget that the restoration of the Carnegie Library was over eight years ago, and its time for some freshening up." These four grants include: repainting the interior of the building, replacing all the lights in the building to high energy efficient LED lights (gallery lights were replaced in 2012), signage improvements, refinishing the floors, energy efficient blinds at the front of the building, and other gallery improvements.

The Ford Family Foundation's Visual Arts Program honors the late Hallie Ford's interests in the visual arts. The goal: Help enhance the quality of artistic endeavor and body of work by Oregon's most promising visual artists. The program also works to improve Oregon's visual arts ecology by making strategic investments in Oregon institutions. Small Capital Projects: Awards are available for improvements to and expansion of studios, and exhibition and appropriate storage space and equipment at key Oregon visual arts institutions.

With a two-year \$20,000 Challenge Grant from the James and Marion Miller Foundation, Crossroads is challenged to increase membership and donations. If the Board and Staff, with the community's support, can increase membership in 2016 by \$10,000.00 they will award Crossroads \$10,000. The same challenge will be in place for 2017.

"Crossroads is thrilled at this tremendous opportunity to grow our membership and donations. This is a clear path to sustainability—we have to increase our local members. With our family membership only \$50 a year for the great programs we offer—our membership is the best kept secret in town," writes Executive Director Ginger Savage.

The Miller Foundation grant will match dollar for dollar all "new" money to Crossroads in memberships and donations to funds such as the Hand to Heart Scholarship Fund, Carnegie Library Building Endowment Fund, BHS Art Scholarship and general operating support or to any program a donor would like. Current members can participate as well by increasing their membership gift.

"If you are an individual member (\$35 a year) and increase to the family membership level (\$50), the increase of \$15 will be matched by the Miller Foundation dollar for dollar. The same goes with current donations or sponsorships; any increase above the current gift the donor has made is matchable by the Miller Foundation," said Savage.

The James F. and Marion L. Miller Foundation, an independent private foundation, was established in 2002 to enhance the quality of life of Oregonians through support of the Arts and Education.

Planning to hear Idaho Power housing plans

The Baker County Planning Commission will hold a public hearing at 6:00 p.m. on Thursday, April 28th, 2016, in the Commissioner's Chambers located in the Baker County Courthouse, 1995 Third Street, Baker City, Oregon, to consider two permit requests.

CUP-16-004: The applicant and property owner, Idaho Power Company, Inc., requests approval for a Planned Unit Development (PUD) and a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) in the Rural Residential (RR-5) Zone and the Exclusive Farm Use (EFU) Zone. They are requesting development of 3 duplex units (6 residential dwellings, total) and a 28-unit capacity recreational vehicle (RV) storage area. The proposed development will provide employee housing and vehicle storage. The Planned Unit Development will be occurring in the RR-5 Zone. The subject property is also identified as Tax Lots 200 (RR-5) & 300 (RR-5 and EFU) in Township 8 South, Range 48 East, W.M., Baker County, OR (Refs. 14772, 12373, 900584, 900799).

PA-16-001: Richard and Lori Daniels, applicants and property owners, are proposing a Plan Amendment to re-zone a ±7 acre portion of their property from Timber Grazing (TG) to a Limited Use Tourist Commercial Combined (LUTCC) Zone. The subject property is identified as Tax Lot 400 of Township 07 South, Range 38, Section 05C, W.M., Baker County, OR (Ref. 10315). The situs address is 51078 Anthony Lakes Highway, North Powder, OR 97867. The applicants propose 16 RV sites, 10 campsites and a toilet facility, as well as a commercial dwelling for business office, caretaker residence, and retail to accommodate on-site guests.

A copy of the application, all documents and evidence submitted by or on behalf of the applicant, and the applicable criteria are available for inspection. The staff report the Planning Commission will use in its decision making process for this request will be available at the Baker City-County Planning Department by April 21st, 2016. A digital copy of the documents can be emailed to you at no cost.

If you have questions regarding the application for PA-16-001, please contact Carson Quam at cquam@baker-county.org. The Baker County Planning Department can be reached at 541-523-8219.