

Local

NRAC: Frustrations with USFS

• RAIL FIRE SALVAGE DISCUSSED

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The Baker County Natural Resource Advisory Committee (NRAC) met for its regular meeting, on Tuesday afternoon, in the Commission Chambers of the Baker County Courthouse. Highlights of the meeting include a discussion begun by local miner Ed Hardt, who voiced frustrations over the years of delays in the U.S. Forest Service's (USFS) mining Plans of Operations approval process.

Attendance included NRAC Chair Doni Bruland, Baker County Commissioner Bill Harvey, NRAC Coordinator Eric Wuntz, Ken Anderson, Chuck Chase, Cynthia "Cookie" Long, Alice Knapp, Jan Alexander, Jake Bingham, Laurene Chapman, and Emily Braswell.

Public attendance included Hardt, and Tork and Wanda Ballard.

Bruland called the meeting to order, and she asked for suggestions in determining what constitutes a quorum (the number of members required to be present, in order to legally transact business), since only four members had attended the August meeting, less than half of the committee, and no decisions were made at that time as a result. Harvey said that a rough draft of the committee bylaws will be formed, and sent to members, which will include the criteria for a quorum.

The first segment of Public Participation (there are normally two; one near the beginning of the meeting, and one near the end) included Wanda, who said she had observed that Hancock Forest Management had no trouble removing timber from slopes in the County, regardless of the incline (this was in reference to one of the roadblocks USFS cites with approving timber sales—the allowable percentage of slope).

Wuntz and Harvey provided an update regarding the coordination process, between the County, and federal agencies. Wuntz said that the Rail Fire this summer, five miles west of Unity, burned nearly all of the area intended to be treated, as part of the USFS's Rail Project. He said that the USFS proposes a timber salvage project, up to 250 acres, at this point.

Harvey said that the County is working on some fuels reduction projects in partnership with



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Long-time miner Ed Hardt stands and voices his frustration with mining regulations and the Federal Government.

the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF), the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), and other agencies and organizations.

Harvey said representatives from the USFS will be present to provide a Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision (BMFPR), on Monday, December 5, 2016, 2 p.m., in the Commission Chambers. This will include discussion of the release of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS, which is expected early next year).

Bruland spoke about the BMFPR mining priorities for Baker County, which Alexander had changed, as discussed previously with the group. According to the document, she replaced "Maintain the ability to mine for minerals" with "Manage the minerals program to provide for exploration, development and production of a variety of minerals on the Forest in coordination with other resource objectives, environmental considerations and mining laws."

Bruland discussed items in a recent USFS Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA), copies of which she handed out to committee members. Included were the BMFPR EIS, with an expected implementation date of April 2017; the Blue Mountains Forest Resiliency Project EIS, with a date of April 2018; the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest Travel Management Plan EIS, with no date listed (on hold); the Two Eagle Vegetation EA (Environmental Analysis), with a date of June 2018; the Charles Grier Johnson, Jr. Research Natural Area Establishment Project EA, with no date listed; the Pine Valley Range Allotment Management Plans EA, with a date of Sep-

tember 2017; the Powder River Mining EIS, with a date of January 2019; the Rail Fire Salvage CE (Categorical Exclusion), with a date of January 2017; the Sparta Vegetation Management Project EA, with a date of March 2018; the Spruce Gulch Quarry EA, with a no date listed; the Upper North Fork John Day Mining EA, with a date of September 2018; the West Sumpter Fuels Maintenance Project CE, with no date listed; and the Whitney Fiber Optic Cable Project EA, with no date listed.

Hardt was asked by Bruland to speak about the SOPA, and about issues the USFS's Plans of Operations approval process (Hardt had mentioned this topic during a County Commission session, and he had informed the Commission Board and attendees that he intended to discuss it also during this NRAC meeting).

Hardt said, "I want to just say that the Forest Service is discriminating against the miners. There are court cases all over, where there's discrimination, and I can prove to you that the miner is being discriminated against..." Hardt went through a list of projects he'd recorded on paper, as well as some in the handout list, and he said, numerous times, "It (the EA, and approval of Plans of Operations) should have been done."

He pointed out the Powder River Mining EIS entry in the handout, and he said, "How the hell did it change, from an EA, to an EIS?" Long said that, there were potential impacts discovered, so, an EIS was deemed necessary, and Alexander said that Whitman District Ranger Jeff Tomac complicated the issue, by combing the Upper and

Lower Powder River's potential mining impacts on bull trout. Hardt said, "From 2009, to 2016, it changed to an EIS...That's not an EIS—that's BS ..."

Hardt continued with examples of how quickly certain EAs were completed, contrasted with mining EAs, including his own, which he says has been in that same status, and incomplete, since 2000. "If they (the USFS) gets somebody on these, they can do them in a month. They can do them in six months. Not 20 years, not 10 years...I'm 83 years old, right now...When they started this, I was 65..."

Harvey said the document states that the scoping process started in 2009 (the Upper North Fork John Day Mining EA), and Hardt said that's wrong, and it should be 2000.

Alexander voiced her own frustrations with the process, including mentioning that Granite-area miners experienced similar delays.

Hardt said that the dates have changed, and projects grouped together, and Anderson said that, every time a new SOPA is out, dates can change, and the process can be delayed indefinitely.

Alexander said, "I 100% agree with Ed..." She discussed some of the efforts the Eastern Oregon Mining Association (EOMA) has put forth, in dealing with this issue, and when Harvey asked her how the BLM (Bureau of Land Management) process compares, Alexander said it was much more streamlined, with less delay.

Bruland informed the group that NRAC meetings are not scheduled for November or December, in order to allow committee members time off to celebrate the holidays.

B2H updates



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Stephanie McCurdy and Jeff Maffuccio.

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Idaho Power Communication Specialist Stephanie "Sam" McCurdy, and Facility Siting Coordinator Jeff Maffuccio, sat at a table in The Little Bagel Shop on Main Street in Baker City Tuesday morning, and provided an update regarding the Boardman to Hemingway (B2H) Transmission Line Project.

The Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) is expected to be released on Friday, November 18, 2016, according to the BLM, which prompted the recent update from McCurdy and Maffuccio.

The project "...is a proposal by Idaho Power to design, construct, operate and maintain a new single-circuit, 500-kilovolt (kV) power line between Melba, Idaho, and the Boardman, Oregon area. The proposed route is approximately 300 miles long and crosses federal, state and private land in six counties in Oregon and Idaho," according to Idaho Power information. The proposed route would cross Morrow, Umatilla, Union, Baker, and Malheur counties in Oregon, and Owyhee County, in Idaho.

Both McCurdy and Maffuccio emphasized that Idaho Power and its contractors aren't conducting transmission line location surveys (they're not "putting stakes in the ground," they said), nor negotiating easements with landowners currently, but rather, cultural, plant, bird and wildlife habitat surveys, in order to assess potential environmental impacts of each potential route. These surveys include requests to landowners, in order to access property (any private information isn't shared).

According to Idaho Power, the project would result in additional capacity, allowing greater amounts of electricity to move throughout the Western U.S.; the line will interconnect with existing transmission facilities owned by Idaho Power's project partners, PacifiCorp, and the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA); and the interconnection would help meet a regional need, and provide benefits to the entire project area, much of which is served, directly or indirectly, by all three transmission providers.

According to Idaho Power, economic benefits to Oregon counties includes tax revenue; according to the company, it has paid over \$500,000 in tax dollars since 2010, just in Oregon. Maffuccio emphasized the yearly economic benefits for Baker County, as well as the benefits to local merchants, during the line's construction.

McCurdy and Maffuccio said that they, like the public, would need to wait until the BLM's release of its FEIS, which they anticipate will be very large, in order to comment about the details.

Walden speaks against rising insurance costs

Washington, DC—U.S. Rep. Greg Walden issued the following statement regarding reports that some insurance plans under Obamacare will see premiums rise by double digits next year:

"Around our region, I hear the same stories from Oregonians—the new health care law is simply not affordable. Consumers are losing access to their health care providers and plans, and deductibles and premiums continue to rise. Now the Administration has admitted that premiums for many plans under the new law will go up by double digits next year. Enough is enough. There is a better way to fix our health care system. I support a plan that would fix this mess with real, patient-centered reform that would lower costs, not raise them and give consumers more control over their health care, not less." For more on the House's "Better Way" health plan supported by Walden, please visit better.gov.

MayDay to hold fundraiser

MayDay, Inc. in Baker City Saturday, October 29, 3:30 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. to closing at Elkhorn Lanes. Join an evening of cosmic bowling fun. The cost is \$15 per person for three games with teams up to six people each. Proceeds go to help victims and survivors of all types of abuse in Baker County.

Two killed in crash near Boardman

On October 24, 2016 at approximately 7:30 p.m. Troopers from the Oregon State Police Pendleton Area Command responded to the report of a head-on crash on Interstate 84 eastbound near milepost 167 (east of Boardman).

Preliminary investigation indicates a 2009 Honda Ridgeline operated by Clifford Ammons, age 77, of Reedsport was traveling westbound in the eastbound lanes of Interstate 84 when it col-

lided head on with a 2005 Ford Mustang operated by Francisco Ramirez, age 27, of Stanfield.

Both Ammons and Ramirez were pronounced deceased at the scene.

A dog that had been riding in the Honda was injured in the crash and transported to a veterinary clinic in Hermiston for treatment.

The Interstate remained closed for approximately 4.5 hours to allow for extrication of the victims,

scene investigation and removal of debris.

Troopers are attempting to determine the location where the Honda Ridgeline entered the Interstate traveling the wrong direction and believe that may have occurred at the Hwy. 730 interchange near milepost 168.

Oregon State Police are asking any witnesses who observed the vehicle traveling the wrong way prior to the crash to contact the Oregon State Police

Pendleton Area Command at 541-278-4090.

Oregon State Police were assisted at the scene by the Boardman Police Department, Morrow County Sheriff's Office, Umatilla County Sheriff's Office, Boardman Fire Department and the Oregon Department of Transportation.

Oregon State Police were also assisted by the Douglas County Sheriff's Office in making next of kin notifications.