

**South Fork John Day Watershed Council
Meeting Agenda
May 9th, 2022**

**1:00 pm, Izee Schoolhouse
Conference #: (844) 857-5555, Access Code: 5526001**

The South Fork John Day River Watershed Council met on the 9th day of May 2022.

The meeting was called to order at 1:03 pm by Joanne Keerins.

In attendance for regular session:

Amy Stiner, SFJDWC	Hannah Latzo, SFJDWC	Lindsay Bullock, SFJDWC	Phil St. Clair, Vice Chair	Jeff Maben, Director
Ryan Torland, ODFW	Ryan Platte, ODFW	Aaron Roth, NRCS	Scott Hess, Director	Jeffrey Kee, landowner
Brandon Ferguson, ODF	Richard Nelson, Director	David Nelson, IZ Ranch	Joanne Keerins, Chair & Director	Mike Keerins, Alternate Director

Quorum was present because there are currently 7 directors on the board and 5 were represented at this meeting.

1. Public Comment – there was no public comment.

2. Agency Reports

- a. Brandon Ferguson, ODF: Brandon announced he was hired as the resource manager, they are now hiring for his former position. Hoping to hire by mid-June.
- b. Aaron Roth, NRCS: With Hannah Smith gone, RCPP projects will now be done by someone new so contact Aaron to figure out who to get in touch with. Successful natural resource fair last month. Grant SWCD tour on May 18.
- c. Phil St. Clair reported on behalf of Justin with Prineville BLM: Recently did an aerial horse count. Did not get 3 full days in, 1 ¾ instead, but 85-90% count in. Ballpark estimate of 700 horses. Still working on fence contracts (due to burned fencing). They do a count every 2-3 years; they estimate the herd grows about 15% per year. The last gathering was done in 2013. In other news, they expect the Sunflower culvert will be replaced this year.
- d. Ryan Torland and Ryan Platte; ODFW Wildlife Biologist Big Game Report:
 - i. Overall message: In a declining deer population. Occupancy modeling (probability of species that will be at a spot) counting has been done on Schneider and forest summer ground. In the most recent fall fawn ratio count, Murderer’s Creek and North Flats had the most. They have been seeing decent buck ratios, near or at goal. Rates are per 100, figured by bucks divided by does times 100. The Canyon Creek burn (2015) has largely driven the ratios and they are seeing more stable numbers in the Murderer’s Creek unit which was most affected by it. Spring deer: 20s to 30s, not great but not horrible because they’re aiming for 40. Take home message: still not doing great. The fire is what’s keeping the numbers up. Buck harvest: In the Northside unit in 2013 over 600 bucks were shot. Now it’s less than half. The MC unit has jumped around but has been above 500 since 2013, thanks again to the Canyon Creek fire. Adult doe survival: 80% survival is the minimum they want to be at; last 4 years of data show they have been below that. Cougars are the most significant known cause of mortality, but that’s biased because it’s also the most easily identifiable. They really don’t have a good picture yet of what’s causing the deaths. Fawn survival: Count in mid-March, 60% survival at that time. No real target survival % yet as it’s only the 3rd year of data, but consistently 60% so far. The

fawns are collared; mortality cause is basically impossible to pin down with no technology to track it and no carcass left when they get to the collar. They want 9000 wintertime deer on MC and 15000 NS wintertime deer, but they also want to raise those numbers. Re: declining population overall: predators have been an impact to some degree; disease is a highly suspected impact looking back, as well as habitat encroachment. Predator control – more predators must be removed and on a longer time basis than expected; it is a political issue as well. Fire on summer range is good, fire on winter range is bad. Elevation affects it as well.

- ii. Elk have maintained themselves consistently and have seen less reduction in their population overall, but seeing some decline, nonetheless. At or above the objective for elk in all units. Still as low as it's ever been, though, this year, but it's only expected to be a single year, at calf ratio of 17.
- iii. Hunting season update: 2022 archery season is now controlled in all Blue Mt units. Tag numbers are about equal to what was reported being hunted last year.
- iv. Winter project: Habitat use of wintering mule deer across a juniper treated and burned landscape: Camera traps on Northside and MC through winter of 2017-18 and 2018-19. Assessed mule deer spatial (where) and temporal (when) use of juniper removal areas. 40 sites across a variety of habitats – untreated/burned, treated/burned, untreated/unburned, treated/unburned. The 1st winter, treated x burned least used, treated x unburned most used. The timing of their use did not change with winter severity, but each habitat use was different. 2nd winter had more severe weather and deer did not respond to any area, they responded to where the snow pushed them. Treated/unburned used for feed and cover, untreated/burned for feed, untreated/unburned for cover. Conclusion: Mule deer use juniper cuts that haven't burned more than areas that haven't been cut or burned. Due to loss of shrubs, mule deer need a mosaic of habitats to meet their daily requirements. Juniper projects should consider fire mitigation at the planning stage. (Annual grass treatment)
- v. Future winter projects: Continue using the camera traps to monitor deer on Schneider; record species interaction; validate population estimates; response to annual grass treatment; use of juniper cuts throughout the winter.
- vi. Summer project: Influence of wildfire and feral horse presence on mule deer summer habitat use: Summer 2019-21. Camera traps were active for 30 days at each site (game trail, closed road, open road/hiking trail). Evaluated deer habitat effected by variables of competition, vegetation, and abiotic. Best model responses were closed road and game trail. Feral horse, distance to forest edge, wildfire were most effective variables. Closed roads had most deer. More deer on east slopes than west slopes, and less deer closer to forest edge. The more feral horses that showed up in photos, the less deer there were. More deer showed up within fire perimeters than beyond it. Conclusion: Feral horse presence negatively impacts mule deer population – they aren't getting pushed out, they are declining in numbers. Wildfire benefits mule deer. Selective timber harvest can be used to create beneficial openings in the forest canopy. Although mule deer tend to occupy most (88%) of their summer range, they're still experiencing a range-wide decline, potentially indicating that the carrying capacity of summer ranges has/is declined/ing.
- vii. Future summer projects: Evaluate indirect effects of 2020 and 2021 general archery season on elk habitat use within MC and Northside wildlife management units; evaluate techniques to estimate feral horse population with camera traps; general species monitoring in Desolation ('22) and Beulah ('23) units.

- viii. Other sound bites: The data on the feral horse population affecting the deer population is in the process of being written to be published for a peer-reviewed journal. Elk travel, so their population is not so affected by the feral horses. Wolf predation effects at this point are mainly felt only on landowners, there is little to nothing they could report for big game numbers.

3. Action Items

- a. April Meeting Minutes – Phil moved to approve; Scott seconded. No discussion. Approved and passed.
- b. April Staff Time – Phil moved to approve; Scott seconded. No discussion. Approved and passed.
- c. Reimbursement Requests – Phil moved to approve; Jeff seconded. No discussion. Approved and passed.

Joanne adjourned the meeting at 3:17, and tabled the staff report and discussion items for the June meeting.

4. Staff Report

- a. Project Updates
 - i. RCPP enrollment
 - ii. BLM Projects
 - iii. Ochoco National Forest Projects
 - iv. Landscape Scale Restoration South Fork John Day Partnership Update
 - v. Grant Applications
 - 1. OWEB Spring 2022
 - a. Goen to Fields Wildlife Enhancements
 - b. Bridge Creek Forestry
 - c. Indian Creek Diversion Relocation and Pipeline Designs
 - 2. Wildlife Conservation Society
 - a. Upper John Day Upland Restoration
 - 3. Upcoming Opportunities: Title II, Landscape Scale Restoration, Western Native Trout Initiative, America the Beautiful Challenge.

5. Discussion

- a. Bark Project Area
- b. Bio Control Release Updates

6. Coming Up

- a. RCPP Cultural Surveys for 2021 Sign-Ups: May 10th-14th
- b. John Day Basin Partnership/Middle Fork Intensively Monitored Watershed Joint Meeting: May 11th, 10:00-2:00. Zoom meeting link available from Hannah Latzo, halatzo@outlook.com
- c. Grant SWCD Annual Meeting, May 18th, more information available from Kyle Sullivan, sullivank@ortelco.net
- d. Amy Stiner Paid Leave, May 25th-30th.
- e. Memorial Day, May 30th, SFJDWC Closed

7. Adjourn, Next meeting date: Monday, June 13th, 2022.