**South Fork John Day Watershed Council**
**Meeting Agenda**
**November 13th, 2023**
**1:00 pm, Izee Schoolhouse**

**Called to order at 1:01 p.m. by Joanne Keerins.**

**Attending:**

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| Amy Stiner, SFJDWC | Hannah Latzo, SFJDWC | Lindsay Bullock, SFJDWC |
| Phil St. Clair, Vice Chair | Jeff Maben, Director | Joanne Keerins, Director/Chair |
| *Jim Dovenburg, Director | Richard Nelson, Director | Caleb Cargill , IZ Ranch |
| *David Helmricks | *Michael Jenson, ODFW | Ryan Torland, ODFW |
| Jake Dittel, ODFW | *Aaron Roth, NRCS | *Alex Makic, USFS |
| *Scott Hess, Director | | |

*Remote attendee

***Quorum was present with 6 of 7 directors in attendance.***

1. **Public Comment**
    a. No public comment.
2. **Agency Reports**
    a. *Aaron Roth, NRCS*: Aaron is continuing the process of transitioning to his new position; Hannah Smith is returning in December to take over DC responsibilities. Emma Immoos is returning to the office as well. Equip IRA deadlines November 17th. The IRA funding is by land use.
    b. Alex Makic, USFS: Ochoco-Paulina hydrologist. Finished 3 range fences, secured funding for Sunflower range.
    c. David Helmricks, ODF: The Community Wildfire Defense grant was released recently. This is focused mainly on defensible space around homes, etc. They've partnered with Grant SWCD for fuels reduction. After the 20th, if anyone has questions about the protection rates, call the ODF office. Currently, the John Day unit is not a high-risk concern, so looking locally within the unit for high-risk areas as they work with partner agencies. 2nd year of joint chief's project – going into expanding OSU rapid assessment, including Dayville and portions of the South Fork. The ODF fuels crew has recently been cutting on the east side of Philip Schneider Wildlife area, reducing fuels, and will be piling and burning this winter.

3. **Action Items**
    a. Staff Reimbursement Request
        i. Phil St. Clair motioned to approve; Richard Nelson seconded the motion; no discussion; motion carried.
    b. September Staff Time
        i. Phil St. Clair motioned to approve; Richard Nelson seconded the motion; no discussion; motion carried.
4. **Discussion**
    a. Ryan Torland and Jake Dittel ODFW Wildlife Biologist Presentation – 5-year mule deer research program
        i. *Context*: Mule deer populations have been declining in the last 40 years in the western united states. In the 1980s, the population was more than 300,000, and it's now less than 175,000. In Murderers Creek, mule deer numbered 20-30,000 in the early '80s, dipped below 10,000 in 1995, and currently are just above 5,000 (known data shows harsh winters and major die-off from 1980-86). The goal is 9,000. Starkey Experimental Forest/Rangeland outside of La Grande is where this project started in 2012. Body fat levels of mule deer, particularly does which the study is focusing on, are much lower than they should be going into winter – essentially no extra fat, just enough for the doe, so coming out of the winter there is not enough fat to meet the energetic needs of lactating does. An ultrasound machine can determine the fat level, or a body pinch. A doe with poor body condition is less likely to be pregnant at all. Healthy does give birth earlier in the season, and their heavier fawns have a higher survival rate. All of this is tied to nutrition. In Starkey, summer forage is different between years and location. Predation is two types: compensatory and additive. In compensatory, the doe is less likely to have survived anyway (if not eaten, would have died by something else, like malnutrition). Additive predation is when the population is

affected – if there wasn't a predator in the landscape, the deer would survive. Summer forage affects this as well. Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming have performed similar studies and found like results so far.

ii. *Local relevance*: The local 5-year study is investigating mule deer survival based on summer nutrition and predation in Murderers Creek. The study is linking doe body condition (based on summer forage) to pregnancy rate, fetal rates, and fawn survival; seeing how available forage on summer range influences doe body condition; and creating a map of forage quality and quantity so managers can quickly assess the habitat. They capture deer in 3 sessions: during early winter (December) they focus on adults and 6-month-olds; in late winter (February/March) they capture adults only; and in late spring (May/June) they are capturing fawns only. Upon capturing does, they insert a transponder that alerts when the doe gives birth, and they go out 3-6 hours later to check the fawn, collaring it and taking a hair sample. The GPS collars alert when a deer dies (based on body temperature and movement), and sends a location so they can respond, hopefully within 24 hours. A field necropsy is performed to see what caused the death. If the cause of death is undetermined, they can take DNA samples of wound sites, bone marrow samples (help check nutrition levels), if unknown age they collect a tooth as well. (They also check for CWD on deer older than 6 months (no current positives)). They're also capturing and collaring bear, cougar, and coyotes to determine their home range and how much space they're taking up in the landscape; in summer, scat detection dogs are utilized to determine abundance. Note on DNA samples: samples are collected and stored until a large number are amassed so they can be sent all at once for cost purposes. It may be 9 months or longer before a DNA sample is sent, meaning that whatever predator was on the deer will not be known until the results are in.

iii. *Year One Results*: 172 deer captured: 76 does, 50 juvenile (23 males, 27 females), and 46 fawns (29 males, 16 females). Winter range is along JD river on highway, up the South Fork and into Murderers Creek. Migration is south or east, a little north. June range is in the wilderness. The summer habitat is composed of: 39% fir, 34% ponderosa, 22% sage, 5% juniper. Data on fawning sites show preferred habitat: 53% fir, 41% ponderosa, 3% sage and 3% juniper. Winter is the highest mortality rate for does and juveniles; 66% of deaths stemmed from predation. Does were predated by cougars and coyotes; juveniles were predated by coyotes and bobcats; fawns were predated by coyotes, bobcat, and bear. The second leading cause of fawn mortality is disease. 37% of the 46 fawns have survived to November 1st. Fawns that died had a median length of survival of 51 days (30 days for females and 76 days for males).

iv. *Future*: They will perform four more years of data collection: capturing deer, determining cause of death, and capturing predators. Vegetation analysis with OSU will start in the summer of 2024 – they'll use GPS data to go to main habitat areas and see what is being foraged. The study is being duplicated in Lakeview starting December 2023.

v. *Wolf updates:* OR 141 was collared last March in Murderers Creek drainage (pictures from 2021). June to November it ranged from Big Summit Prairie (Ochoco) to Snow Mountain. It appears to be running with a partner as there are two sets of tracks in some instances. OR 131 dispersed from Baker County and in May 2023 it moved over to Snow Mountain but has been tracked to almost Mitchell. Potentially has a partner as well. East of 395, there are 5 wolves in Logan Valley pack, one was killed two weeks ago and is presumed to be a member of that pack. ODFW does monitoring, collaring and tagging, and depredation investigations. Because they are federally protected, USFWS investigates the removal. 4 depredations have been confirmed that OR 141 is associated with within the last 9 months, so the landowner was issued a kill permit to take one wolf.

5. **Coming Up**
    a. 11/14: OWEB site visits
    b. 11/17-26: Amy on Vacation
6. **Adjourn, 3:24 p.m.** Next meeting date: **Monday, December 11th, 2023**