South Fork John Day Watershed Council
Meeting Minutes
January 12, 2026
1:00 pm, Izee Schoolhouse

In attendance (remote attendance indicated by *) for regular session:

Board Members/Staff

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| Jeff Maben, Chair | Phil St. Clair, Vice-Chair | Scott Hess, Secretary | Joanne Keerins, Director |
| MT Anderson, Director | Richard Nelson, Director | Jim Dovenberg, Director* | Mike Keerins, Alternate |
| Amy Stiner, SFJDWC | Hannah Latzo, SFJDWC | Lindsay Bullock, SFJDWC* | |

*With 7 out of 7 directors in attendance, a quorum was present.*

Agencies

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|---|---|---|---|
| Jake Dittel, ODFW | Nolan Riis, ODFW | Brandon Ferguson, ODF* | Darryl Clark, USDA* |
| Zane Murray, USFS* | Jennifer Bush, USFS* | Hannah Smith, NRCS* | Rebecca Schwartz, TU* |
| Amy Charette, OWEB* | John Rowell, Grant Co.* | Ian Bulen, ODF | Dan Somers, ODFW |

Public/Unaffiliated

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|---|---|---|
| Eric Keerins* | Mary Lou Welby* | Molly Hess |
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The meeting was called to order at 1:00 pm, by Jeff Maben.

1. **Public Comment**
    a. None.
2. **Agency Reports (5 minutes per agency)**
    a. Darryl Clark, USDA: Started in July with ODFW as non-lethal wolf services for the territory (Grant, Harney). Main job is helping producers with non-lethal methods of wolf predation prevention. This includes hazing, range riding, looking for signs of wolves/checking for activity, and cleaning up carcasses/bones from properties. His services are free, and he suggests taking advantage of it, so they can start documenting non-lethal efforts by producers to provide a stronger case for later lethal method applications.
    b. NRCS: Application deadline for all programs is Thursday, Jan. 15. Deferral letters from past applications that were unfunded were recently sent out. Letter recipients have 30 days to reach out, or the application will be canceled to help with rollover.
    c. USFS: A forester was assigned to the Utley Butte project. He is currently in the process of putting units together, analyzing stands, and delineating units. It's wild horse dispersal time and property owners with horses on their land are asked to please call or email it in. USFS does plan to gather horses in fall 2026.
3. Jake Dittel, ODFW Mule Deer Predator Study
    *a.* A total of **443 deer** have been tracked in the study, including **147 adult does, 137 six-month-old fawns, and 160 neonates (newborn fawns)**. Average body fat (BF) measurements show deer typically lose about **3% BF over winter**. By year, deer entered winter with **9.9% BF in 2022–2023 and left with 7.7%**, **10.0% in 2023–2024 and left with 6.4%**, and **8.0% in 2024–2025 and left with 5.9%**; deer entered **2025–2026 at about 11% BF**, with end-of-winter values still pending. Preferred

targets are **10–12% BF entering winter** and **8–9% BF leaving winter**, while **levels below about 6% BF** are associated with difficulty supporting fawns and reduced survival. *Full summary at the end of meeting minutes*.

4. **Action Items**
   a. Board Elections, Term – 2026 – 2029: Scott Hess, Richard Nelson, and Jim Dovenberg are up for re-election.
      i. Phil St. Clair made a motion to re-elect Scott Hess, Richard Nelson, and Jim Dovenberg to the Board. Joanne Keerins seconded the motion; the motion passed unanimously with the 3 nominees abstaining.
   b. Officer Elections
      i. Chair – MT Anderson nominated Jeff Maben for the Chair position. Joanne Keerins seconded the motion; the motion passed unanimously with Jeff Maben abstaining.
      ii. Vice Chair – Joanne Keerins motioned for Phil St. Clair to be vice-chair. Richard Nelson seconded the motion; the motion passed unanimously with Phil St. Clair abstaining.
      iii. Secretary/Treasurer - Phil St. Clair motioned for Scott Hess to be secretary/treasurer. Richard Nelson seconded the motion; the motion passed unanimously with Scott Hess abstaining.
   c. Staff Time Approval

| Motion to Approve | Seconded | Discussion? | Vote |
|---|---|---|---|
| MT Anderson | Phil St. Clair | No | Unanimous |

   d. Minutes Approval

| Motion to Approve | Seconded | Discussion? | Vote |
|---|---|---|---|
| Joanne Keerins | Phil St. Clair | No | Unanimous |

   e. Financials Approval

| Motion to Approve | Seconded | Discussion? | Vote |
|---|---|---|---|
| Phil St. Clair | MT Anderson | No | Unanimous |

   f. CD Approval
      i. Approval to invest $50,000 in a 6-month Certificate of Deposit (3%) at Bank of Eastern Oregon with Amy and Board Chair Jeff Maben on the Account.

| Motion to Approve | Seconded | Discussion? | Vote |
|---|---|---|---|
| Phil St. Clair | Richard Nelson | Yes – verifying BEO is competitive rate. | Unanimous |

   g. Letter of Comment regarding Pet and Livestock Protection Act
      i. The board requested Amy to send a letter of comment.
   h. Letter of Comment regarding BLM Battle Creek Juniper removal.
      i. Amy submitted the letter on the deadline, January 9th. The letter was based on landowners contacting SFJDWC with concerns that the BLM's juniper removal would occur in low

priority areas. Prioritization maps from several other agencies identify high-priority juniper removal areas.

5. **Staff Report - rescheduled for 02/09/2026**
    a. 2014-2026 Project Report
    b. Grant results: secured 1 out of 4 even though all were recommended for funding.
        i. Murderers Creek phase II was funded
        ii. Engagement, Aldrich Forestry, monitoring strategy, were not funded
    c. Upcoming proposals

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| Oregon Conservation Recreation Fund: Monitoring Strategy |
| OR Community Foundation: Capacity |
| OWEB – Rocking Nine River Design |
| OWEB - Cottonwood Ck Design |
| OWEB - Utley Culturals |
| OWEB - Aldrich Forestry |
| OWEB - Cottonwood Juniper |
| OWEB - Engagement |
| OWEB Sm Grant - Cottonwood Pasture Fence and Juniper |

6. **Discussion**

The group discussed wolf management and non-lethal efforts in Oregon. Daryll, who works for Wildlife Services, offered to help producers with non-lethal measures like hazing and cleaning up carcasses to deter wolves. They agreed that while non-lethal methods can document efforts, they may not effectively reduce wolf conflicts in the long term. The group acknowledged that the current Oregon Wolf Plan requires non-lethal efforts before lethal action can be taken, though there are some exceptions for chronic depredation. They discussed the need for thorough documentation of wolf problems to potentially influence future policy changes.

7. Nolan Riis and Daryll Clark discussed the challenges of resolving conflicts with wolves, emphasizing the importance of documentation for both lethal and non-lethal actions. They mentioned that the Pet and Livestock Protection Act has passed the House and aims to delist wolves in the lower 48, potentially providing more tools for managing wolf conflicts.

8. **Coming Up**
    a. 2/2/2026: OWEB application deadline
    b. 2/9/2026: Annual Self-Assessment

9. **Adjourn meeting,** Next meeting date: **Monday, February 9th, 2026**

Mule Deer Study Summary

This multi-year study examines mule deer body condition, measured as body fat (BF), and how it relates to adult overwinter survival, neonate and fawn survival, fecundity, predation risk, and seasonal forage conditions. The study's primary goal is to evaluate how changes in body fat affect survival outcomes, by comparing body condition when deer enter winter in early December with body condition when they leave winter in late February. The study area extends from the South Fork area east to the Beulah hunting unit, and from Highway 26 South to Burns, with major capture locations at Fawn Springs in Canyon Creek and the Philip Schneider Wildlife Area (PSWA). Deer within the study migrate between winter and summer ranges. Typical movement distances are approximately 15–20 miles, with the longest recorded movement being about 29 miles. Fawn Creek deer tend to travel relatively short distances, generally remaining around Strawberry Mountain, Starr Ridge, and Logan Valley, while deer from PSWA move farther south toward Burns.

Body condition is assessed primarily using ultrasound measurement of rump fat above the tail head, with a secondary "pinch" method used when animals are too lean for ultrasound to detect fat. A total of 443 deer were tracked, including 147 adult does, 137 six-month-old fawns, and 160 neonates. Adult bucks are not intentionally tracked, although some may be collared as fawns before sex is known, and precise age classes are not assigned because accurate aging would require tooth extraction.

Deer in the study lose roughly 3% body fat over the winter. Ideally, deer would enter winter with 10–12% BF and leave winter with 8–9% BF. Instead, they are typically entering winter at about 9% and leaving at about 6%, which is near or below the threshold needed to successfully support fawns. Year-specific averages indicate that deer began winter 2022–2023 at 9.9% BF and ended at 7.7%, began winter 2023–2024 at 10% and ended at 6.4%, and began winter 2024–2025 at 8% and ended at 5.9%. For winter 2025–2026, deer entered at approximately 11%, and end-of-winter values are not yet available. The Rail Ridge and Falls fires negatively affected both summer and winter forage, contributing to poorer body condition entering winter 2024–2025. Managers note that summer forage appears to be more important than winter forage for overall body condition. Deer in the current year are the fittest seen so far, due to a mild winter and late rains, with individual deer measuring 18–19% BF.

Body condition is strongly tied to survival. Each 1% increase in BF corresponds to about a 28% increase in overwinter survival for adults. Deer with at least 9% BF have nearly 100% chance of surviving winter and are less likely to die from predation. Does with higher BF also produce fawns with better survival odds; a 1% increase in doe BF leads to a 20% increase in her fawn's survival probability, while does with around 7% BF experience approximately 50% fawn mortality. Deer do not appear to experience age-related declines in body condition in the same way elk do.

Body condition varies by study site. Deer at Lakeview and John Day (JD) show similar fall condition, but JD deer leave winter in poorer condition. As a result, overall survival appears higher at Lakeview. Among six-month-old fawns, 137 individuals have been measured, and their mean body weight generally ranges from 30–34 kg. Survival probability increases by roughly 35% for every 5 kg increase in body mass. A weight of about 33 kg corresponds to a 50% survival threshold, while current averages just above 30 kg fall below this benchmark.

Neonate monitoring includes 160 newborns, consisting of 72 males, 80 females, and 7 unknowns or stillborn individuals. Mean birthweights were 3.51 kg in 2022–2023, 3.39 kg in 2023–2024, and 3.37 kg in 2024–2025, showing only a very small downward trend. Fawning begins in May, peaks in early June (with June 2 identified as the peak date), and then tapers into early July. The earliest recorded birth occurred on May 23, and 8–10 fawns per day are commonly recorded at peak. Early fawns are more vulnerable to predation; late fawns tend to come from

thinner does and have a lower chance at survival; while peak-season fawns show the highest survival. Neonate survival rates were approximately 13% in 2023, 9% in 2024 (the lowest year), and 12% in 2025.

Overall fawn survival to one year of age is approximately 10%, meaning a 90% mortality rate. Most losses occur within the first 30–45 days of life. The primary causes listed include predation, disease, and poor body condition. Determining exact causes of death is challenging because fawn carcasses are typically scavenged within 6–8 hours regardless of cause. Survival of deer over one year old is approximately 70%, which is near but slightly below the estimated 72% survival needed for a stable population.

The project is incorporating predator abundance and movement data to better understand predation effects. Oregon State University collaborators are using scat-dog crews to locate and analyze predator scat, estimate predator numbers, define home ranges, and collect collar data. An anecdotal observation from the study noted that a 135-pound doe collared in December was recently killed by a 40-pound bobcat, illustrating that predation risk is not limited to the largest carnivores.

Data collection for the project is scheduled to conclude in August 2027. Three helicopter capture periods remain (February 2026, December 2026, and February 2027), along with two additional fawning seasons that will be monitored for a full year (summers 2026 and 2027). Definitive analyses and final results are expected no earlier than 2029, and more likely between late 2029 and 2030.