

Dear Slater Turner and the Ochoco National Forest,

I am writing in support of Alternative #2 for the Lemon Gulch Trail System. This project is an amazing opportunity for all of Central Oregon, that has been the result of countless hours of collaborations, and I feel the original plan should be respected.

One of the best aspects of our government and land is the idea that we all own it, and maintain it. As a teacher who taught outdoor recreation, the main foundation of the class was that people would not care for, or protect something, unless they experienced it. It is the premise of our National Parks, and why the Forest Service has the Every Kid Outdoors Program. Once people have a positive experience with something, they are more likely to care and support that program. Alternative #2 makes that happen. By providing miles of varied terrain that meets all abilities, it will make countless people fall in love with the forest, and work towards maintaining it. Alternative #2 gets all skill levels outside, but in a regulated way where people have designated trails that have been professionally designed and built to reduce damage to the area.

There is a fear that creating an attraction will destroy the area, but in the mountain biking community, normally it is the opposite. COTA & the mountain biking community in central Oregon are prime examples of the benefits they contribute. With a well marketed and clear campaign about trail stewardship, they are modeling how to treat both the trails and the people on the trails. This community is constantly forming forest cleanup groups to remove dump sites in the National Forest, weed picking parties to remove cheatgrass, or just trail maintenance groups to maintain their trails. They do this because they care about the resource that they are using. Some may argue that the same thing would happen with the smaller alternatives, but I would argue Alternative #2 is still better because it disperses people, thus reducing their impact on the limited number of trails.

Every other option condenses riders into a confined area. By spreading people out, there is less damage to the trails, less congestion on the trails, and less impact on wildlife and cattle. Ranchers have expressed concern about conflict with people. With a more spread out option, there will be less conflicts and negative effects of this. Just look at the cooperation at the Horse Butte Trail System. Bikers work with the rangers to work on fencing options and the stewardship principle is stressed to keep conflict minimized.

Lemon Gulch also is very unique because it could provide a true downhill biking experience. That experience is limited in the Central Oregon area, which is why Alternative #2 is needed. With bikers actively seeking downhill, the fewer trails there are, the more likelihood of congestion, and the unfortunate possibility of some users making their own trails. By selecting Alternative #2, you would be selecting a well planned large project that will not need to be upgraded or deal with social trailed. With a well planned progressive project that will be adding trails over a long period of time, all users and wildlife will have time to become accustomed with each other.

With any development or change is bound to scare and upset those who are not aware of what this project can do for the community. There has been an unfound fear of “becoming the

next Bend". One trail system is not going to do that. Look at Oakridge, it has several trail systems and it hasn't become a Bend. It has however benefited immensely from the income brought from the trails. Please don't let the loudest no's take away an opportunity that would benefit not just the local community but all of Central Oregon.

Please support Alternative #2 which provides a unique and amazing gem for the entire Central Oregon mountain biking community. A gem that will be protected and cared for.

Thank you for your consideration,

Mark Habliston