

August 6, 2023

Jennifer Abernathy, NEPA Planner
Ochoco National Forest
3160 NE Third Street
Prineville, Oregon 97754

RE: Ochoco National Forest/ Corral Flat Equestrian Endurance Trail Project

Dear Jennifer,

I wish to thank you and Slater R. Turner, District Ranger, and all the other forest service employees that have worked on and provided us, the equestrian users, the opportunity to provide comment and relate our interest in seeing the Scoping and NEPA study finally come to fruition. My name is Pat Marquis and I am currently the Chapter Chairperson for the local (Central Oregon) Chapter of Oregon Equestrian Trails. However I am submitting this letter and comments as an individual equestrian and participant in many activities upon the Ochoco Forest.

I have read your presentation letter and attachments as distributed in early July regarding the subject project and feel that you have pretty much "hit the nail on the head". Thank you! I have been riding horseback on trails and cross country within the confines of the Ochoco Forest since 1992. I have always been somewhat dismayed that this process has taken so long to grasp and get underway, let alone come to this point of fruition. I first started riding in the area around Indian Prairie and Mt. Pizgah. We took our children on many outings within that area because it was pure, meaning it was without the entry of "Off Road Vehicles" and bicycles had not engaged the area at that early date.

Through the years I have continued my interest in riding and specifically within the confines of the Ochoco Forest. My wife, Rhonda, and I participated many years in the counting of the Wild Horse herds, from Round Mountain excursions to the proposed "High Horse Camp" area and from our base camp at Corral Flat. We have often been pleasure riding the trails and cross country treks from the Corral Flat area and the area we have come to call "Man Camp", as OET and BCHO had annual rides in this area.

When the OHV proposals were made so many years ago to thread their way in and around these often used trails and dispersed camping areas we spoke out, understanding that the Endurance Trails already occupied the area and should hold some priority as they engaged such a large sector of our community and interest group. Thankfully that OHV trail system was put on hold, but the endurance trails were still in a state of limbo, not having been realized by the Forest Service for their importance to the equestrian community. Thankfully that now appears to be at an end.

When I first started riding these trails so many years ago they were beautiful single track trails that suited the equestrian community to a "T". The trails were flat bottomed and merely wide enough for a single file of one or more horses. The trails often engaged some of the primitive roadways where a side by side ride could be enjoyed. It was heavenly!

Unfortunately these corridors and trails were discovered by many who disregarded their pristine nature and a process of degradation was incurred by mis-use or over use. I am thankful that your NEPA process

has discovered these areas that are in need of tending and improving the tread, or even moving the trail a slight distance to avoid negative environmental concerns and impacts. The addition of maps that shall depict the true and authorized trail system is much needed to keep the public in a knowledgeable position to keep to the trails and not disperse their tracks into more sensitive natural landscape. Re-assurance markers would also be helpful to those equestrians and hikers that lack the on-site knowledge to stay engaged with the trails.

The "Forest Plan" as stated on Page 3 of your presentation outlines the various user groups to be upon managed trails. Your stated purpose is to meet the needs of the community by providing designated trail systems for equestrian users. However, I was not able to find a specific statement that would limit the proposed trail system to be for Equestrian and Hiker use only. I am an advocate of separate trails for other user groups, meaning that bicycles and including the new electric bikes, motorized vehicles (OHV's and motorcycles), and other user groups would find their trails elsewhere. I trust that this is the intent, but it needs to be spoken outright and notice made that these equestrian trails will be signed for their use and depict whomever should not be on them.

With regards to the existing primitive roads that have been closed, certain Districts within the Deschutes Forest have begun to create a narrower travel route on these roads by allowing placement of logs, brush and large stone upon a portion of the width of these roads to discourage other usage.

I am aware that certain portions of the proposed trails travel upon grazing leases and that fences and cattle guards may be obstacles encountered by the equestrian users. I would like to suggest that the wire gates existing could be replaced by steel gates that could be operated by the equestrian without leaving the saddle. Both BCHO and OET equestrians, and the endurance riders have discussed having their volunteers provide a work crew to replace the old wire gates. If that could be a chosen path for improvement I am sure we (equestrians) would be able to submit a design appropriate for the users and the cattle operations for yours and the lessee's approval.

With that, I believe I have had my say. Thank you once again for the efforts of your staff to be engaged, listening and providing a thorough and thought provoking review of the issues to make the endurance trails system an official trail reality.

Yours Truly,

Pat Marquis

mailto: [REDACTED]

Ph#: [REDACTED]

Address: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] [REDACTED]