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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Please consider my comments regarding Ochoco wild horse management. I feel that I may represent a different voice in the plan to amend and restructure the Forest Service management of the Ochoco Wild Horse Herd. I am a resident of private land off of Highway 26 at Mile Marker 46, just to the north west of the range being considered. I have a home on 13 acres that border the Ochoco National Forest. I am a mountain biker, a hiker, a fisherman and an amateur photographer. I am a father of an 8 year old girl and a husband to a woman that also enjoy those hobbies mentioned above. Having such close proximity to the Ochoco National Forest, I have tracked and immensely enjoyed getting to watch the wild horses in their natural habitat. I call these horses wild, because they behave as natural, thriving and symbiotic members of the forest, unlike the range cattle and sheep that do damage to the boundary fences, the wetlands and native plants and seem very poorly managed by the governing bodies that allow them access. In fact, the horses and their ability to roam freely do much less damage than the human hunters, recreators, atv/utv users and campers that leave their garbage and tear up meadows. I spend much time picking up the garbage they leave behind and warning irresponsible explorers to stick to public roads. There is plenty of space for the current level of wild horses to thrive, to hide from humans (ask most people who go to have a peak and they often never find them) and to continue to have healthy babies as well as the old and lame horses to add to the ending cycle of life that provides food for predators and fertilizer for new growth.

In regards to the viability of the size of the wild horse herds, I am concerned that reducing the size below the current level will put the future of wild horses in the Ochocos in jeopardy. Both from the viewpoint of continued genetic variability as well as attrition of aging horses or environmental factors that could reduce the size such as harsh climate or wildfire. It seems that managing a general size of around 135+ horses would protect the future of these smart, capable beasts that are part of the identity of the area. I have many friends that are responsible users of the forest that come to enjoy the territory with a hope of seeing the horses and never feel as though they are restricting other opportunities such as hunting, biking, hiking, driving...in fact they feel it enhances those experiences to have the horses in the habitat. I have seen studies such as the one by Dr. Gus Cothran from Texas A&M that give scientific weight to the avoidance of herd inbreeding through a large enough herd size to support genetic variability. I have, in the last few days, seen the new foal of the Steens Mare who was introduced to improve this variability in a now 16 horse band that is thriving and healthy after a moderate winter. On the subject of healthy survival and management during Ochoco winters, that is a tough subject as we have such unpredictable and inconsistent weather patterns from year to year. Although there have been a few harsh winters in the last few years that have taken a toll on the wild horses, that seems to be another reason for larger and healthier herds and genetic variability to ensure ongoing survival. I have noticed other animals such as the elk, deer, antelope, cougars that share the same habitat continue to survive and reproduce due to large numbers after harsh winters. The wild horses have similar if not keener instincts for survival as other big mammals but only if they are allowed the opportunity to thrive in larger numbers.

I have come across some of my own neighbors that don't appreciate the horses and have a critical voice to their existence. Without exception, these are the same people who abuse the land with their atv's and snow cats, who cut wood without permits, who kill animals for sport illegally and sometimes not for practical use of meat. They aren't the types of humans that actually sit and watch the wild horses interact with each other or nature. They don't see the foals being born, being nurtured, they don't see the pecking order and social hierarchy of the stallions and chosen mares who keep the bands organized and healthy. Many humans think that if there is no practicality the horses, if they are protected and not a benefit to all, that they should be gone. I realize that there are these same voices within the forest service hierarchy that see the wild herd as more work for them, more liability for their public image and another conflicting hot button issue that has to be managed carefully among competing users of the forest. Those are valid issues and if the forest management were really prioritized as to

the biggest offender, it would be obvious that irresponsible human behavior and out of compliance grazing from cattle and sheep would far outweigh the impact of 135 wild horses.

Thank you for your consideration in my "insiders" view of the wild horse population of the Ochocos.

Sincerely.

KW