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First name: Stephen

Last name: Henderson

Organization:

Title:

Comments: This letter of support for the Lemon Gulch Trail proposal.

I am a mountain biker and I have been a member of COTA since the Crook County Chapter was formed in 2013.

The Lemon Gulch trail proposal has special appeal to me because it will provide more miles of easy trail in the ONF and these trail will be close to home. I am 70 years old and I had quadruple by-pass surgery 4 years ago. My ability to navigate the existing trails - Potlid, Cougar, Scotty and Lookout Mountain - is becoming increasingly difficult. I would welcome the opportunity to ride trails I can manage and have these trails close to home.

The comprehensive EA released by the Forest Service thoroughly addresses potential environmental impacts of a trail network in the Lemon Gulch area and clearly shows that environmental and resource concerns can be mitigated through careful planning.

The EA identifies six alternatives for a Lemon Gulch trail network. Alternative #1 represents No Action. A No Action decision meets none of the goals of this project or the Forest Plan and will not provide any more miles of trail for mountain biking. Alternative #2 is the original trail layout of 52 miles and Alternative #6 is the Forest Service preferred alternative. My comments below will focus on Alternatives #2 and #6.

I would encourage the Forest Service to move forward with Alternative #2 as it most thoroughly achieves the overall goals of this project. It also provides the best alternative for a proactive approach to meeting the increased demand for non-motorized recreation in the ONF. Even at 52 miles, when combined with the existing 152.5 miles of trail it achieves only 44 percent of the Forest Service desired goal 468 miles. In addition, none of those existing 152.5 miles of trail were built for mountain bikes so, except for the trails I mentioned above, they are are not rideable for me.

However short of the full build of Alternative #2, Alternative #6 is the best compromise. I do have the following concerns regarding Alternative #6:

1. The removal/realignment of the North-South arterial trail below FSR 3360. The original trail design located this trail to follow just above the creek and allowed for an easy green trail that all riders could navigate down to the lower trailhead. In alternative #6 this trail has been moved to a position above FSR 3360. The terrain in this area is steep and will not lend itself to an easy return to the lower trailhead. The unintended consequences of this change will force riders to return to the lower trailhead via the road or bypass the lower trailhead completely and just use the middle trailhead. In addition this change reduces the number of green / easy trail miles in the proposal.
2. The omission of the short trail near the middle area of the network (image attached). This trail, which is isolated on an open ridge line and surround by other trails, was included in Alternatives #2, #3, and #4. The EA does not appear to identify any environmental or resource concerns, grazing concerns, or the fracture of wildlife corridors related to this trail. While short in distance, this trail would provide an additional easy trail. I recommend including this trail as part of Alternative #6.

The Lemon Gulch Environmental Assessment clearly shows that environmental and resource concerns can be mitigated through compromise and thoughtful planning. Therefore I encourage the Forest Service to move forward with this project.