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Title:

Comments: The Ochoco's is special because it does not have an excess of people. Forty years ago camping on Cultus lake was a favorite childhood memory. It was beautiful and the wildlife was magnificent. Deer and Elk were not an uncommon sight. Today going to the high cascade lakes such as Cultus or Elk lake in the summer there are hundreds of vehicles parked on the side of the road, parking lots are full and I never see any large game animals. It is crowded and it takes away from the enjoyment and safety for many. Oregon has a lot of national forest and BLM land and we are fortunate, as a lot of states do not have this, however not every forest needs to be commercialized. The Ochoco's does not need to become over populated with visitors like so many other forests. When I took my children to hike to the blue pools they said what are those mom..... they were bags of dog poop all along the trail! Yea those don't grown in the dispersed camping and hiking area we typically go to in the Ochocos. As a child I went camping at the beach, when I got home my mother asked me how camping was. I told her we didn't go, we went and stayed in a parking lot and it was really cool. The innocence of my youth not understanding that a campground was camping is the essence of the Ochoco's. It is the silence on a crisp cool morning and the gentle stream on a hot summer day. Seeing bucks in the rut and seeing herds of elk, or a yearling bear wondering up a hillside. Commercializing the forest for activities takes this away. People see dollar signs, I see ruining all the activities this unique forest has to offer and enjoy. I suffer from PTSD and the Ochoco's is my church, the Ochoco's is my therapy, the Ochoco's is the only place that I can get away from the anxiety of life and find balance. For so many, simply bringing in more people limits their access. The Ochoco's is safe to camp as a single mother, it is a safe place to hike, to have a picnic and to get out of the house. We unfortunately are at a time in our lives that even our schools are not safe, CCHS literally just had a gun on campus. So as a single mom I may not be safe in a campground, I may not be safe at a public rest stop, I may not be safe at Safeway in Bend, I may not be safe at a public school...but I am safe in the forest away from people, my kids can run freely without traffic, without the fear of strangers and without a mom that has to be hyper vigilant because the world around us is no longer safe. Please don't bring more people into the Ochoco's, our children need somewhere safe to play and be care free. There are some things in life that are truly priceless and I strongly feel that there is no dollar amount of financial benefits which would change my mind. Stop taking away nature, stop taking away what God created, stop discriminating against people that enjoy and or need the forest as it is their lives. There are land owners, hunters, trappers, horseback riders, hikers and multi generations of families that deserve to have a forest that isn't prioritizing trails over what it currently provides for people. Which herd of elk in the Ochocos will still be grazing where there are a group of mountain bikers riding through? Where did the big game go that used to drink out of Cultus lake and Elk lake? Commercializing the high cascades pushed them out, commercializing the Ochoco's will do the same and discriminate against the rights of those that want to access the national forest in a way that doesn't involve trails for recreation. There are countless trails for mountain bikes, horseback riding, hiking, ATVS, UTVS, camping, day use, group sites and accessibility, when is enough enough? The Ochoco's is unique in having the juniper meet the pine trees and special in that there are still places a person can go without seeing another human for the day, years ago there were a lot of places you could go for weeks without seeing another human, but more and more people accessing the Ochoco's due to improvements has taken that away. Don't take this away, don't destroy natures most efficient ecosystem by bringing in more people. Once upon a time those roads in the Ochoco's were skid trails for loggers and it was the most magical place in the world. It was also a time of timber carnivals in a quiet town with three stop lights and a community where everyone knew your name. That time is a distant memory for Prineville and it has progressed but it has also lost its culture, it's community and it's safety for our youth. We commercialized and now we don't even have water in Prineville reservoir or Ochoco lake which previously brought in people and revenue. I think we should put time, effort and money into fixing the things commercializing has broken, rather than expanding. I say we start with sustainable water resources, because without them we will not have a forest for anyone to enjoy or commercialize.