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Title:

Comments: The Citizens in Support of Public Lands (CSPL, allcitizenslands.org) is a local group of several hundred people who are concerned about management of public lands. We are all frequent users of the Ochoco National forest, and represent many of the multiple uses of this public land: hiking, riding horses, skiing, birding, and camping to name a of the uses we represent. Many of us have seen some of the wild horses in the Ochoco NF, and appreciate the unique qualities and history they bring to our experience.

We also understand the limits of the ecosystem of the forest, and the need to share. Hikers share the trails with horse riders, and hunters share the wildlife with birders. Conflicts arise when the use of one group is detrimental to the use of another group. This is currently the case with the wild horse population, which itself is suffering from growing beyond the level the available resources can support.

As documented in the EA, studies show that the wild horse population is well above the sustainable level for a healthy herd, and the population is actively degrading the environment, especially with vegetation trampling around springs. (EA, p. 2) Other negative effects of the large horse population are described and documented in the EA (p. 8), such as competition with wildlife and permitted grazing. We understand and agree with these points.

Unless other users of the forest give up some resources, the wild horse population must be reduced to an appropriate level. That is, if the amount of livestock grazing was reduced, there would be more forage for horses. Or if a smaller population of elk was supported, there would be more forage for horses. Yet even this would not help with the severe limitations winter forage puts on the horse population (EA, p. 6 and Appendix B).

We therefore support Alternative 2 as the preferred alternative for this EA. This establishes a reasonable AML of 12 - 57 horses which can be supported by forage along with existing grazing AUMs and wildlife. This also utilizes modern and humane methods of population growth control by removing excess individuals and using fertility control methods. The result will be a small horse population of healthy individuals, rather than a population that suffers more sickness and periods of starvation. The native wildlife will also benefit from reduced competition, and our public lands will be healthier for all users.

We encourage the FS to move forward with Alternative 2 and thank the FS for allowing us to comment on all the work you put into this document.