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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear Mr. Turner,

I am writing to express my strong support for Alternative #2 - full build out of the originally proposed 51.3 miles of trail at Lemon Gulch. This alternative is superior to the other alternatives in helping to meet the overall goal for recreation on the Ochoco National Forest as stated in the Ochoco Land and Resource Management Plan. Although the Forest Service now proposes a smaller trail network - Alternative #6 - consisting of 27.5 miles, I would urge decision makers to proceed with Alternative #2 and reserve the option to reduce the mileage, if necessary, based on monitoring of trail use and impacts during the initial 4-6 years of trail construction.

Before offering further comments, I'd like to express my deep appreciation for the detailed, balanced, professional, state-of-the art draft Environmental Assessment (EA) developed by the Forest Service. This project is the culmination of a long (> 13 year) process that engaged a multitude of diverse stakeholders, considered, and rejected two other site locations, and ultimately settled on the current range of alternatives - further illustrating that the process has been robust, inclusive, and used the best available information. The Service has addressed the complex array of issues and opinions in a fair and transparent manner that underscores the credibility of their decision-making process.

Some high-level considerations in support of Alternative #2 include the following:

- (1) there are currently no mountain bike trails designed and built specifically for mountain bike use in the forest;
- (2) the 51.3 trail miles proposed in Alternative #2 would comprise only 11% of the total trail miles (468 miles) envisioned in the Forest Plan and has a footprint of less than 1% of the 3,370-acre project area;
- (3) the trail network would also be open to hikers and runners, and;
- (4) the trail network would be built in 3 phases with ample time between each phase to monitor, learn and adjust as needed.

Regarding the key issues and concerns associated with this project: Potential impact on wildlife is the most critical consideration so it is important to emphasize that based on a thorough analysis, no significant adverse impacts were associated with the implementation of Alternative #2. Impact on grazing was raised as a concern and fully assessed, concluding that potential impacts are manageable with user education being an important tool. Moreover, it should be noted that grazing allotments currently comprise 731,450 acres or 86% of Ochoco national Forest System lands and that grazing - itself - has negative impacts on terrestrial and aquatic wildlife and habitat. Finally, concerns about negative impacts on the culture and lifestyle in Prineville were voiced. The notion that 52 miles of bike-hike-runner trails, 20 miles from Prineville would have a significant negative impact seems highly unlikely. That said, it is inevitable that as the bike trail network is built out, it will attract riders who will stop in Prineville for food, beverage, and lodging, thus giving the city an economic boost, which will probably be welcomed by most residents.

The Forest Service decision "will be based on a comparison of how well the alternatives meet the purpose and need for action, how well alternatives address the key issues, potential for environmental effects, and consideration of public comment" (page 20). Using these decision criteria, I believe Alternative #2 scores the highest and therefore warrants selection as the path forward.

Without doubt, because of the total mileage and diversity of trail types, Alternative #2 meets the purpose of the project to a greater extent than any other alternative. It also surpasses the other alternatives in terms of meeting

the need for the project, especially when considered in view of the increasing demand for mountain bike trails, the current lack of mountain bike trails in the forest, and the miles of other existing and planned trails that already/will serve hikers, runners, and equestrians. Because of its greater total mileage, the potential environmental impacts of Alternative #2 will inevitably exceed to some marginal extent the impacts associated with other alternatives. But the key point is that the impacts of Alternative #2 are judged to be not significant or in a few cases only slightly negative and therefore are not a credible rationale for rejection of Alternative #2. As for public comments, it will be up to the Forest Service to assess the comments and decide how they affect the selection of one of the alternatives. That said, based on the Public Scoping Notice and resulting comments submitted during March - August 2021 it seems that a small vocal minority is driving the opposition to Alternative #2 while public support for the project is strong and widespread. The Ochoco National Forest is a public resource designated for a reasonably balanced mix of uses to meet a range of needs. Alternative #2 is the proper fit and best meets the purpose and need for action on this project.

In closing, I appreciate the opportunity to express my views on this matter and look forward to the Forest Service decision. And again, I urge the Service to proceed with Alternative #2 with the option to adjust the total mileage if warranted in the future.

Thank you for your consideration,
Fred Betz