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Comments: I support the development of the Lemon Gulch trail network in the Ochoco National Forest. Further, I support the implementation of alternative 2.

This project is clearly a well thought out and well-studied proposal that will help meet the current and future needs of recreation in the Ochocos. The work of Ochoco Trails represents years of dedicated planning and collaboration that has led to a proposal that can solve several issues. Mountain bike users are clearly a fast-growing segment of users in the Ochocos; by creating this network of trails in an already heavily used area close to town we can maintain the wild and rugged nature of more remote areas in the Ochocos. This will also help relieve the pressures of conflict with other users in other recreation areas as well as help discourage the creation of unauthorized trails elsewhere in the forest.

Increased recreation in the Ochocos is a completely predictable future. Trail conflict and crowding will be a certainty in the near term if additional trail opportunities are not implemented soon. Upkeep of existing recreational assets, already significantly underfunded, will continue to lag and maintenance backlogs continue to grow.

According to a study published in September 2022 by the nonprofit Conservation Economics Institute, the combination of significantly increased recreational use of public lands combined with a severe decrease in funding for recreation management is compromising the adversely affecting the sustainability of recreation resources. This project addresses increasing demand by providing a network of trails that contains opportunities for all experience and skill levels. Further, trail maintenance will be the responsibility of the Central Oregon Trail Alliance (COTA) who, through donated resources, both financial and volunteer, will provide that maintenance. Government funding allotted to the Ochoco National Forest will remain available for existing recreation assets and any increases can be concentrated on trails not covered by volunteer agreements with COTA.

Crook County and Prineville will also benefit enormously, from both economic and health perspectives. Having a nonmotorized trail network much closer to town means easier access for local families to get out and enjoy the forest in a manner that will lead to a healthier population. Studies have shown that in Oregon alone, mountain biking cuts \$26 Million annually in health care costs.

Mountain biking has also repeatedly been shown in small towns around the country to add a significant boost to the economy. In Oakridge, Oregon mountain bikers spend \$2.3-\$4.9 million every year. Prineville is in a perfect position to gain these advantages that tourism brings without detracting from the small-town lifestyle that residents enjoy.

I encourage you to commit to alternative 2, the most robust of the 6 alternatives listed in your proposal. As you point out in this analysis, it represents a very small percentage of the land area in the Ochoco National Forest and strikes a good balance in strategically minimizing ecological impacts. It also more realistically meets the anticipated future growth in demand for recreational trails. The other alternatives will likely fall short in this respect and result in additional, lengthy, resource intensive NEPA efforts in the foreseeable future.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this trail proposal.