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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Re: Non-motorized trail proposal for Lemon Gulch

My recommendation: Alternative 2, 51.3 miles of new trail

The Ochoco National Forest is almost 845,500 acres, with 86% used for livestock grazing - almost 731,500 acres. Remember those numbers.

As far back as 1987 the Forest Service recognized mountain biking as a valid recreational pursuit suitable for inclusion in Ochoco National Forest plans. The mountain biking community has been proposing new trail mileage for the Ochoco since 2010. The current forest management plan (Ochoco Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) set a goal of 468 miles of non-motorized trails. Current non-motorized mileage is well short of the Forest Service objective at just 156 miles. And currently, of those 156 miles just 25 miles are managed for mountain biking.

In 2017 a diverse group of non-motorized trail users began meetings facilitated by the Prineville Chamber of Commerce. The efforts of this group of citizens, including a Prineville open house, led to a non-motorized trail proposal for Forest Service consideration. The Forest Service looked at the three areas proposed (Lemon Gulch, Potlid and Scotty Creek/Cougar Creek) for trail development and after consultation with Fish and Wildlife narrowed the proposal to Lemon Gulch. At roughly 3,000 acres the Lemon Gulch complex represents just 0.3% of the Ochoco National Forest.

It's important to remember the diverse group of involved citizens that created the Lemon Creek complex trail proposal are all based in the Crook County area and their efforts were supported by the Prineville Chamber of Commerce. These engaged Crook County citizens and community leaders recognize recreation on national forests help businesses and communities directly and indirectly connected to recreation, provide economic stability and jobs for local communities, and serve as a quiet place of respite.

They also respected the process! They worked in good faith and with a recognition that there would be constraints on where trails could be constructed. The Lemon Gulch proposal is the result of this good faith, multi-stakeholder, multi-disciplinary, multi-year process.

Now at the eleventh hour, bad faith actors have thrown sand in the works with scary scenarios of crime, garbage, traffic and unwanted visitors. These bad faith actors have no respect for the process. They have no respect for the majority of Crook County residents who would benefit from a trail system close to town. They have no respect for the businesses in Prineville that will directly and indirectly benefit from a trail system close to town.

I've read through the entire Lemon Gulch Trails Project Environmental Assessment and it's an impressive and comprehensive document. I am struck by how small the alternatives are in terms of trail mileage, ranging from barely 19 miles to just over 50 miles. Given the effort it's taken to get this far it seems silly to end up with just 19 (alt 4), or 28 (alt 5) or the mileage in between these (alt 3 and alt 6). That's why I'm strongly recommending Alternative 2 with 51.3 miles. While 51.3 sounds like a lot of miles it's still a pretty small number compared to the Forest Service's own objective of 468 non-motorized miles and due to phasing the Prineville community won't see the completion of the full 51 miles until almost 10 years from now!

Alternative 2 provides enough mileage to provide a diversity of trail experiences - from beginner to advanced, cross-country to downhill. Alternative 2 provides enough miles to make the effort of packing up and driving out to

Lemon Gulch worth the effort. Alternative 2 provides enough mileage to keep Crook County residents coming back for more exploring. And Alternative 2 at 51.3 miles spread over 3,000 acres the Lemon Gulch Trails Project Environmental Assessment documents negligible impacts.

Its been five years since the Ochoco Trails group began their work advocating for more non-motorized trails on public land. The hoops have been jumped through, the objections have been swatted away, now its time to approve this project and get to building trails!