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First name: Stephanie

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Organization: Oregon Trails Coalition

Title: Director

Comments: Dear Slater Turner and the Ochoco National Forest,

The Oregon Trails Coalition is a coalition of broad-based, statewide trail interests dedicated to supporting, promoting, and advocating for the preservation, development, and stewardship of a statewide network of sustainable, world class trails that provide access to outdoor recreation and active transportation for all. We are a coalition of federal, state, and local agencies, trail user groups, outdoor industry and tourism partners, media professionals, and volunteer organizations. We span Oregon's urban and rural communities and represent all trail users from urban, multi-use paths to backcountry trails. We include hikers, mountain bikers, equestrians, OHV riders, nordic skiers, paddlers, trail runners, mobility device users, and more.

We want to share our support for the development of the Lemon Gulch trail network in the Ochoco National Forest.

The Lemon Gulch proposal came out of a multi-year collaborative effort by Ochoco Trails, which is a group made up of representatives of diverse recreation user groups and stakeholders, much like our statewide coalition. Lemon Gulch is part of their forest-wide proposals for trails that would meet existing and growing demand for outdoor recreation. The draft Environmental Assessment clearly states there is a significant need for additional non-motorized trails in the Ochoco National Forest, as outlined in the forest management plan created in 1989. With only 156.5 miles of a 468 mile objective (and no trails managed for mountain bikes) the USFS must move forward in meeting the goals of their own forest plan.

The Lemon Gulch proposal was informed by a robust stakeholder process and would help the USFS make progress towards those objectives. Additionally this proposal would achieve the following goals outlined in the EA:

The terrain and style of riding in Lemon Gulch is desirable for mountain bikers and is not found in other regions. Creating a network more attractive to mountain bikers in Lemon Gulch will reduce user conflict and crowding on other multi-use trails in the Forest.

The Lemon Gulch trail network shows a wide variety of trails suitable for all levels of riders. The inclusion of trails that meet design standards for adaptive mountain bikes provides critical access for riders with disabilities that does not exist in the Ochocos and is difficult to find throughout Central Oregon.

Crook County and Prineville will also benefit enormously from having a trail network much closer to town. Local families will have easier access to the health benefits of getting out and enjoying the forest.

We truly appreciate the breadth of issues that the USFS assessed through the draft environmental assessment and the thoroughness with which this project has been approached.

We join the mountain bikers within our coalition in expressing our broad support for Alternative 2: the buildout of fifty-two miles of trails in this concentrated area as a strong approach to balancing the growing recreation access needs of our community with limiting impacts on wildlife and other forest uses across the Ochoco National Forest.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Noll,  
Oregon Trails Coalition Director