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Comments: Hello,

I am writing on behalf of Team Dirt, the Benton County Oregon chapter of the International Mountain Bicycling Association in support of the proposed USFS Lemon Gulch Trail System. Team Dirt is Dedicated to stewardship of sustainable, multiple-use, and purpose-built trails, to the preservation of mountain biking access through advocacy and education, and to the promotion of responsible trail use.

Mountain biking is a popular and exciting outdoor activity that can provide numerous benefits to individuals and communities. Expanding mountain bike trails in the Ochoco National Forest would be a great way to enhance economic, environmental, advocacy, and recreational opportunities and promote healthy living in the Prineville / Crook County area. Specific benefits of the proposed Lemon Gulch Trail system location include its close proximity to the City of Prineville and area populations as well as access to existing recreational amenities such as the Wildcat and Ochoco Reservoir Campgrounds.

One of the main benefits of mountain biking is the economic boost it can bring to a community. Mountain biking can be a major draw for tourists, bringing in additional revenue to local businesses through increased tourism.

From an environmental standpoint, mountain biking can have a positive impact on the natural world. Well-designed trails can help to minimize erosion and protect natural habitats, while also providing an opportunity for people to appreciate and learn about the environment. Mountain biking can also encourage the conservation and preservation of natural areas, as people who engage in the activity often become advocates for the protection of these areas.

In addition to the economic and environmental benefits, mountain biking can also provide numerous recreational opportunities for the community. It is an activity that can be enjoyed by people of all ages and abilities, and can provide a low-impact, cardiovascular workout that can improve physical health and mental well-being. Mountain biking can also be a great way to spend time with friends and family, promoting social connection and a sense of community.

Addressing issues specifically identified in the November 2022 Draft Environmental Assessment:

In our experience, developing trail systems with a "primary" user group (in this case mountain biking) is one of the best ways of mitigating trail user group conflicts / Goal Interference. Whether the conflicts are real (conflicts in shared resources, speed conflicts, trail impacts, etc.) or perceived (value conflicts etc.), the option to set aside specific areas as primarily hiking / mountain bike / equestrian use maximizes public benefit and minimizes the potential for future conflict. After reviewing the proposed options in the Environmental Assessment, we believe Alternative 2 provides the most benefit to our mountain biking constituents and the general public.

Alternative 2 Provides the most mileage and opportunities for recreation with construction of trails of various difficulty and terrain. This, in turn, addresses two key findings as identified by Professor Roger Moore (NC State University) in his synthesis regarding Conflicts on Multiple-Use Trails:

Provide Adequate Trail Opportunities -- Offer adequate trail mileage and provide opportunities for a variety of trail experiences. This will help reduce congestion and allow users to choose the conditions that are best suited to the experiences they desire.

Minimize Number of Contacts in Problem Areas -- Each contact among trail users (as well as contact with evidence of others) has the potential to result in conflict. So, as a general rule, reduce the number of user contacts whenever possible. This is especially true in congested areas and at trailheads. Disperse use and provide separate trails.

Design considerations: Alternative 2 also includes trail climbing options for "Cross Country" style Mountain Bike riding, which will serve a larger portion of the mountain bicycling community and provides opportunities not found in several of the other Alternatives. Cross country style trails offer the additional benefit of access, as these types of trails may be comfortably and safely enjoyed on nearly any bicycle-similarly trails within part of our own trail network at Alsea Falls often draw families and users with more modest equipment (e.g., department store bikes).

We ask that the USFS weigh the existing benefit to a small number of people currently utilizing the area for Grazing (and the adverse environmental impacts this activity imparts on the land under the existing use) against the potential benefits to the community at large and the general public and find in favor of recreation as a more beneficial and productive use of this land.

Overall, the expansion of mountain bike trails in the Ochoco National Forest - Lemon Gulch project would provide numerous benefits to the local community, including economic development, environmental stewardship, advocacy for natural areas, and recreational opportunities for people of all ages and abilities.

Respectfully,  
Benjamin Leland  
On behalf of Team Dirt a Chapter of IMBA