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Comments: Dears Sirs with Ochocos National Forest Service:

I am submitting these comments Back Country Horsemen of Oregon (BCHO) OET and BCHO volunteers maintain trails and advocate for equestrian access to public land. PNER and AERC sponsor equestrian endurance rides, including the Bandit Springs Endurance Ride which has been held at Corral Flat each year since 1991.

We are thrilled at the prospect of adding the Corral Flat endurance trails to the Forest Service's system trails. We all love this beautiful area and enjoy recreating on the trails, so we appreciate and value your efforts to designate these trails for equestrian use.

We have several suggestions with respect to this project.

We applaud your efforts to mitigate the damage done by ATVs in this area. We've been dismayed to see the ruts and erosion getting worse each year. We believe your efforts to physically block closed roads are an important step, and we suggest stepping up enforcement to ensure that repaired areas are allowed to regenerate.

We would like to see the Corral Flat trails restricted to horses and hikers, with mountain bikes (MTBs) and off-highway vehicles (OHVs) prohibited. As you are aware, horses are easily spooked by MTBs and OHVs.

Designating these trails as non-motorized will ban OHVs, but unfortunately, most non-motorized trails allow mountain bikes. It's important that equestrians have trails to ride that do not have MTB traffic, and Corral Flat is an ideal place for this. Please designate these trails for equestrians and hikers only.

Please consider installing bow gates next to all wire gates. The gates should be six feet wide and of a style that can be opened and closed from horseback. These gates could be self-closing if this is helpful to grazing permittees. We may be able to provide some funds to purchase these gates and will be happy to help install them.

We suggest installing colored diamond trailblazers on the trees to indicate the trail routes, with each trail marked with different color diamonds. This will aid the public in staying found and will reduce the need for the endurance community to sign the trails for the annual endurance race.

The trails near small creeks and cattle troughs can get very muddy. It may be necessary to reroute the trails away from their current locations; install bridges, puncheons, or other structures; or harden the creek crossings to minimize vegetation damage and downstream sedimentation. We are happy to help with these efforts.

In several spots, the provided map differs slightly from the historical and current permitted endurance trail routes. We would like to help the Forest Service ground-truth these areas to ensure the trails are in sustainable locations that serve the riding public and the endurance community.

It may be desirable to reroute a few trails because they go through open meadows or riparian areas or along busy roads. We support efforts to make the trails more ecologically and socially sustainable.

The trails go through the wild horse management area, so it's likely that trail users will encounter them. We suggest placing educational information on the trailhead kiosks so visitors will know what to do (and what not to do) if they encounter wild horses.

We hope that the "wish lists" of the ranchers who run cattle in this area will be considered. The project will only be successful if all affected parties have something to gain from it. And grazing permittees are definitely affected parties.

We think that improving the fencing around the meadow is a great idea.

We're not necessarily opposed to the idea of fencing the campground itself, but we're not sure what the goal is.

Is it to keep cattle out? To ensure OHVs exit the area via the road and not the trails? To confine camping damage to a limited area? If you decide to fence the campground, we suggest installing three bow gates for trail

access, plus a cattle guard at the main road. Also, buck and rail fences are very attractive, but may not be the most effective way to enclose the camping area. They are high maintenance, easy to pull down or cut up, and difficult to incorporate steel bow gates into. We would be interested in exploring alternative fencing options if you decide it is necessary to fence the campground.

We stand ready to assist the Forest Service in installing signs, putting diamonds on the trees, rerouting trails as needed, installing gates, etc. We are willing to help with other aspects of the plan as well. Please let us know how we can help.

Finally, a question. Is the name of this area Corral Flat or Corral Flats? The scoping letter refers to it as Corral Flats, but the Ochoco National Forest map refers to it as Corral Flat. Which is correct?

Thank you for considering our suggestions. We look forward to working with you to make this equestrian trail network a fabulous addition to the Forest Service's trail system.

Sincerely,

Becky Hope, Public Lands state representative for the Back Country Horsemen of Oregon.