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Title:

Comments: I recently received notification of the Forest Service's proposal for a new trail (Cowhorn Cutoff) to connect the Timpanogas Lake Basin to the Windy lakes basin and solicitation for comments on the proposal. I recently encountered flagging for the trail across the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) during a recent week-long hunting trip in the area, but was unsure of the intent of the flagging. I am opposed the proposed trail for the reasons explained below.

While I am submitting these comments as a concerned citizen, I am a natural resource specialist who began my career in 1980-82 working in the Crescent/Odell/Summit lakes area. I've never missed a year since to visit this area to camp, hike, elk and deer hunt, summit Diamond Peak and Cowhorn, and mountain bike the very trails you are proposing to connect. In 38 years I've become extraordinarily familiar with the area of your proposal. I began elk hunting in this area in 1986 by cross county navigation with a map and compass through the area of Summit, Meek, Windy, Suzanne, and Darlene lakes. For the last 17 years I've been using GPS for my cross county navigation. I began mountain bike riding in 1992 and began riding the Summit, Meek, Crescent, Oldenberg, Suzanne, Darlene, Windy, Summit loop long before it was popular to ride, and I continue to ride it to this day. As an avid mountain biker I am not opposed to new trail opportunities; however, the location for the proposed trail is not appropriate. The area where the trail will traverse between the PCT and the Windy lakes contains complex and steep topography, and areas of dense young hemlocks among tall old stands of trees. This is an area that reliably has lots of elk use because it is somewhat remote and has little human activity for most of year, contains lots of cover, and remains shady and cool in the summer. The new trail will make access to this area easier not only for mountain bikers, but for hikers, equestrians, backpackers, and hunters. The increased use will create additional long-term disturbance to the elk and other wildlife, such as martin and potentially wolves, which take refuge and utilize this area. Currently, the trail access to the Windy lakes is via the Summit/Meek trailheads, Crescent Lake, or from the Windigo Pass area. These are relatively long day hikes, and access from Summit and Meek trailheads is limited to those whose vehicles can survive the 6010 road. Despite this, the Windy lakes basin has signs of over use by people. Creating a shorter trail access from the Timpanogas basin, which is a relatively popular area and has easier vehicle access, will increase the use of the Windy lakes basin. The Windy lakes basin is also a relatively remote area that contains excellent cover for elk as well as the steep and shaded North/Northeast facing slope of the Cascades crest.

While the Oregon Timber Trail Alliance's rationale appears to be single-focused on easy access for mountain bikers, the Forest Service needs to evaluate the consequences of the additional access by other users. As a mountain biker I see no issues with using the "indirect" road routes for access between the two areas (and I have never illegally ridden the PCT). However, there may be an alternative to create the desired mountain bike access without creating a short corridor directly to the Windy lakes basin that would encourage other users and impact an important wildlife area. My suggestion is to extend the 3643 trail north from its junction with road 372 through sections 4, 33, and 34 and connect with the 46 trail. The amount of new trail for this route appears to be similar to the current proposal, achieves a similar objective of avoiding the road and providing connectivity for bikers, while not creating a new trail through an important wildlife area or a shortcut directly to the Windy lakes basin. I have hiked through the area described above and in my opinion it does not hold the same wildlife value as the area of the current proposed route and is nearer to Summit Lake which is scenic and already receives significant recreational use. It appears that the Oregon Timber Trail Alliance's objective is to create a "[hellip]premiere long distance mountain biking route", and the current 2.2 mile proposal might seem insignificant in that goal, but the specific route can have significant impacts that can only be brought forth by someone intimately familiar with that area.

My primary recommendation is for no new trails to be constructed through an area that already has an extensive

trail system, and ask bikers to continue using the 6010 road or the 60 road via Windigo Pass. My secondary recommendation is to change the proposed trail route as I described above.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments.

Ken Homolka